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SECRETS OF THE WOODS

WILLIAM J. LONG

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There was Tookhees sitting on the rim of my drinking cup

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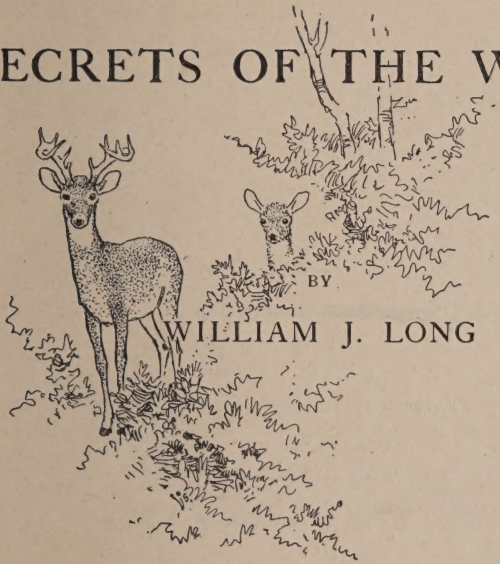
SECRETS OF THE WOODS



BY

WILLIAM J. LONG

WOOD FOLK SERIES

BOOK THREE

BOSTON, U.S.A., AND LONDON

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TO

CH'GEEGEE-LOKH-SIS, 'Little Friend Ch'geegee,' whose coming makes the winter glad

PREFACE

THIS little book is but another chapter in the shy, wild life of the fields and woods, of which "Ways of Wood Folk" and "Wilderness Ways" were the beginning. It is given gladly in answer to the call for more from those who have read the previous volumes, and whose letters are full of the spirit of kindness and appreciation.

Many questions have come of late with these same letters; chief of which is this: How shall one discover such things for himself? how shall we, too, read the secrets of the Wood Folk?

There is no space here to answer, to describe the long training, even if one could explain perfectly what is more or less unconscious. I would only suggest that perhaps the real reason why we see so little in the woods is the way we go through them — talking, laughing, rustling, smashing twigs, disturbing the peace of the solitudes by what must seem strange and uncouth noises to the little wild creatures. They, on the other hand, slip with noiseless feet through their native coverts, shy, silent, listening, more concerned to hear than to be heard, loving the silence, hating noise and fearing it, as they fear and hate their natural enemies.

We would not feel comfortable if a big barbarian came into our quiet home, broke the door down, whacked his

war-club on the furniture, and whooped his battle yell. We could hardly be natural under the circumstances. Our true dispositions would hide themselves. We might even vacate the house bodily. Just so Wood Folk. Only as you copy their ways can you expect to share their life and their secrets. And it is astonishing how little the shyest of them fears you, if you but keep silence and avoid all excitement, even of feeling; for they understand your feeling quite as much as your action.

A dog knows when you are afraid of him; when you are hostile; when friendly. So does a bear. Lose your nerve, and the horse you are riding goes to pieces instantly. Bubble over with suppressed excitement, and the deer yonder, stepping daintily down the bank to your canoe in the water grasses, will stamp and snort and bound away without ever knowing what startled him. But be quiet, friendly, peace-possessed in the same place, and the deer, even after discovering you, will draw near and show his curiosity in twenty pretty ways ere he trots away, looking back over his shoulder for your last message. Then be generous — show him the flash of a looking-glass, the flutter of a bright handkerchief, a tin whistle, or any other little kickshaw that the remembrance of a boy's pocket may suggest — and the chances are that he will come back again, finding curiosity so richly rewarded.

That is another point to remember: all the Wood Folk are more curious about you than you are about them. Sit

down quietly in the woods anywhere, and your coming will occasion the same stir that a stranger makes in a New England hill town. Control your curiosity, and soon their curiosity gets beyond control; they must come to find out who you are and what you are doing. Then you have the advantage; for, while their curiosity is being satisfied, they forget fear and show you many curious bits of their life that you will never discover otherwise.

As to the source of these sketches, it is the same as that of the others — years of quiet observation in the woods and fields, and some old notebooks which hold the records of summer and winter camps in the great wilderness.

My kind publishers announced, some time ago, a table of contents, which included chapters on jay and fish-hawk, panther and musquash, and a certain savage old bull moose that once took up his abode too near my camp for comfort. My only excuse for their non-appearance is that my little book was full before their turn came. They will find their place, I trust, in another volume presently.

WM. J. LONG.

STAMFORD, CONN., June, 1901.

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SECRETS OF THE WOODS

TOOKHEES THE 'FRAID ONE

LITTLE Tookhees the wood mouse, the 'Fraid One, as Simmo calls him, always makes two appearances when you squeak to bring him out. First, after much peeking, he runs out of his tunnel; sits up once on his hind legs; rubs his eyes with his paws; looks up for the owl, and behind him for the fox, and straight ahead at the tent where the man lives; then he dives back headlong into his tunnel with a rustle of leaves and a frightened whistle, as if Kupkawis the little owl had seen him. That is to reassure himself. In a moment he comes back softly to see what kind of crumbs you have given him.

No wonder Tookhees is so timid, for there is no place in earth or air or water, outside his own little doorway under the mossy stone, where he is safe. Above him the owls watch by night and the hawks by day; around him not a prowler of the wilderness, from Mooween the bear down through a score of gradations, to Kagax the bloodthirsty little weasel, but will sniff under every old log in the hope of finding a wood mouse; and if he takes a swim, as he is fond of doing, not a big trout in the river but leaves his eddy to rush at the tiny ripple holding bravely across the current. So, with all these enemies waiting to catch him the moment he ventures out, Tookhees must needs make one or two false starts in order to find out where the coast is clear.

That is why he always dodges back after his first appearance; why he gives you two or three swift glimpses of himself, now here, now there, before coming out into the light. He knows his enemies are so hungry, so afraid he will get away or that somebody else will catch him, that they jump for him the moment he shows a whisker. So eager are they for his flesh, and so sure, after missing him, that the swoop of wings or the snap of red jaws has scared him into permanent hiding, that they pass on to other trails. And when a prowler, watching from behind a stump,

sees Tookhees flash out of sight and hears his startled squeak, he thinks naturally that the keen little eyes have seen the tail, which he forgot to curl close enough, and so sneaks away as if ashamed of himself. Not even the fox, whose patience is without end, has learned the wisdom of waiting for Tookhees' second appearance. And that is the salvation of the little 'Fraid One.

From all these enemies Tookhees has one refuge, the little arched nest beyond the pretty doorway under the mossy stone. Most of his enemies can dig, to be sure, but his tunnel winds about in such a way that they never can tell from the looks of his doorway where it leads to; and there are no snakes in the wilderness to follow and find out. Occasionally I have seen where Mooween the bear has turned the stone over and clawed the earth beneath; but there is generally a tough root in the way, and Mooween concludes that he is taking too much trouble for so small a mouthful, and shuffles off to the log where the red ants live.

On his journeys through the woods Tookhees never forgets the dangerous possibilities. His progress is a series of jerks, and whisks, and jumps, and hidings. He leaves his doorway, after much watching, and shoots like a minnow across the moss to an

upturned root. There he sits up and listens, rubbing his whiskers nervously. Then he glides along the root for a couple of feet, drops to the ground and disappears. He is hiding there under a dead leaf. A moment of stillness and he jumps like a jack-in-a-box. Now he is sitting on the leaf that covered him, rubbing his whiskers again, looking back over his trail as if he heard footsteps behind him. Then another nervous dash, a squeak which proclaims at once his escape and his arrival, and he vanishes under the old moss-grown log where his fellows live, a whole colony of them.

All these things, and many more, I discovered the first season that I began to study the wild things that lived within sight of my tent. I had been making long excursions after bear and beaver, following on wild-goose chases after Old Whitehead the eagle and Kakagos the wild woods raven that always escaped me, only to find that within the warm circle of my camp-fire little wild folk were hiding whose lives were more unknown and quite as interesting as the greater creatures I had been following.

One day, as I returned quietly to camp, I saw Simmo quite lost in watching something near my tent. He stood beside a great birch tree, one hand resting against the bark that he would claim next

winter for his new canoe; the other hand still grasped his axe, which he had picked up a moment before to quicken the *tempo* of the bean kettle's song. His dark face peered behind the tree with a kind of child-like intensity written all over it.

I stole nearer without his hearing me; but I could see nothing. The woods were all still. Killooleet was dozing by his nest; the chickadees had vanished, knowing that it was not meal time; and Meeko the red squirrel had been made to jump from the fir top to the ground so often that now he kept sullenly to his own hemlock across the island, nursing his sore feet and scolding like a fury whenever I approached. Still Simmo watched, as if a bear were approaching his bait, till I whispered, "*Quiee*, Simmo, what is it?"

"*Nodwar k'chee Toquis*, I see little 'Fraid One," he said, unconsciously dropping into his own dialect, which is the softest speech in the world, so soft that wild things are not disturbed when they hear it, thinking it only a louder sough of the pines or a softer tunking of ripples on the rocks.—"O bah cosh, see! He wash-um face in yo lil cup." And when I tiptoed to his side, there was Tookhees sitting on the rim of my drinking cup, in which I had left a new leader to soak for the evening's fishing, scrubbing

his face diligently, like a boy who is watched from behind to see that he slights not his ears or his neck.

Remembering my own boyhood on cold mornings, I looked behind him to see if he also were under compulsion, but there was no other mouse in sight. He would scoop up a double handful of water in his paws, rub it rapidly up over nose and eyes, and then behind his ears, on the spots that wake you up quickest when you are sleepy. Then another scoop of water, and another vigorous rub, ending behind his ears as before.

Simmo was full of wonder, for an Indian notices few things in the woods beside those that pertain to his trapping and hunting; and to see a mouse wash his face was as incomprehensible to him as to see me read a book. But all wood mice are very cleanly; they have none of the strong odors of our house mice. Afterwards, while getting acquainted, I saw him wash many times in the plate of water that I kept filled near his den; but he never washed more than his face and the sensitive spot behind his ears. Sometimes, however, when I have seen him swimming in the lake or river, I have wondered whether he were going on a journey, or just bathing for the love of it, as he washed his face in my cup.

I left the cup where it was and spread a feast for the little guest, cracker crumbs and a bit of candle end. In the morning they were gone, the signs of several mice telling plainly who had been called in from the wilderness byways. That was the introduction of man to beast. Soon they came regularly. I had only to scatter crumbs and squeak a few times like a mouse, when little streaks and flashes would appear on the moss or among the faded gold tapestries of old birch leaves, and the little wild things would come to my table, their eyes shining like jet, their tiny paws lifted to rub their whiskers or to shield themselves from the fear under which they lived continually.

They were not all alike — quite the contrary. One, the same who had washed in my cup, was gray and old, and wise from much dodging of enemies. His left ear was split from a fight, or an owl's claw, probably, that just missed him as he dodged under a root. He was at once the shyest and boldest of the lot. For a day or two he came with marvelous stealth, making use of every dead leaf and root tangle to hide his approach, and shooting across the open spaces so quickly that one knew not what had happened — just a dun streak which ended in nothing. And the brown leaf gave no sign of what it

sheltered. But once assured of his ground, he came boldly. This great man-creature, with his face close to the table, perfectly still but for his eyes, with a hand that moved gently if it moved at all, was not to be feared — that Tookhees felt instinctively. And this strange fire with hungry odors, and the white tent, and the comings and goings of men who were masters of the woods kept fox and lynx and owl far away — that he learned after a day or two. Only the mink, who crept in at night to steal the man's fish, was to be feared. So Tookhees presently gave up his nocturnal habits and came out boldly into the sunlight. Ordinarily the little creatures come out in the dusk, when their quick movements are hidden among the shadows that creep and quiver. But with fear gone, they are only too glad to run about in the daylight, especially when good things to eat are calling them.

Besides the veteran there was a little mother-mouse, whose tiny gray jacket was still big enough to cover a wonderful mother love, as I afterwards found out. She never ate at my table, but carried her fare away into hiding, not to feed her little ones — they were too small as yet — but thinking in some dumb way, behind the bright little eyes, that they needed her and that her life must be spared with greater precaution

for their sakes. She would steal timidly to my table, always appearing from under a gray shred of bark on a fallen birch log, following the same path, first to a mossy stone, then to a dark hole under a root, then to a low brake, and along the underside of a billet of wood to the mouse table. There she would stuff both cheeks hurriedly, till they bulged as if she had toothache, and steal away by the same path, disappearing at last under the shred of gray bark.

For a long time it puzzled me to find her nest, which I knew could not be far away. It was not in the birch log where she disappeared — that was hollow the whole length — nor was it anywhere beneath it. Some distance away was a large stone, half covered by the green moss which reached up from every side. The most careful search here had failed to discover any trace of Tookhees' doorway; so one day when the wind blew half a gale and I was going out on the lake alone, I picked up this stone to put in the bow of my canoe. That was to steady the little craft by bringing her nose down to grip the water. Then the secret was out, and there it was in a little dome of dried grass among some spruce roots under the stone.

The mother was away foraging, but a faint sibilant squeaking within the dome told me that the little

ones were there, and hungry as usual. As I watched there was a swift movement in a tunnel among the roots, and the mother-mouse came rushing back. She paused a moment, lifting her forepaws against a root to sniff what danger threatened. Then she saw my face bending over the opening — *Et tu Brute!* and she darted into the nest. In a moment she was out again and disappeared into her tunnel, running swiftly with her little ones hanging to her sides by a grip that could not be shaken,— all but one, a delicate pink creature that one could hide in a thimble, and that snuggled down in the darkest corner of my hand confidently.

It was ten minutes before the little mother came back, looking anxiously for the lost baby. When she found him safe in his own nest, with the man's face still watching, she was half reassured; but when she threw herself down and the little one began to drink, she grew fearful again and ran away into the tunnel, the little one clinging to her side, this time securely.

I put the stone back and gathered the moss carefully about it. In a few days Mother Mouse was again at my table. I stole away to the stone, put my ear close to it, and heard with immense satisfaction tiny squeaks, which told me that the house was again occupied. Then I watched to find the path by which

Mother Mouse came to her own. When her cheeks were full, she disappeared under the shred of bark by her usual route. That led into the hollow center of the birch log, which she followed to the end, where she paused a moment, eyes, ears, and nostrils busy; then she jumped to a tangle of roots and dead leaves, beneath which was a tunnel that led, deep down under the moss, straight to her nest beneath the stone.

Besides these older mice, there were five or six smaller ones, all shy save one, who from the first showed not the slightest fear but came straight to my hand, ate his crumbs, and went up my sleeve, and proceeded to make himself a warm nest there by nibbling wool from my flannel shirt.

In strong contrast to this little fellow was another who knew too well what fear meant. He belonged to another tribe that had not yet grown accustomed to man's ways. I learned too late how careful one must be in handling the little creatures that live continually in the land where fear reigns.

A little way behind my tent was a great fallen log, mouldy and moss-grown, with twin-flowers shaking their bells along its length, under which lived a whole colony of wood mice. They ate the crumbs that I placed by the log; but they could never be tolled to

my table, whether because they had no split-eared old veteran to spy out the man's ways, or because my own colony drove them away, I could never find out. One day I saw Tookhees dive under the big log as I approached, and having nothing more important to do, I placed one big crumb near his entrance, stretched out in the moss, hid my hand in a dead brake near the tempting morsel, and squeaked the call. In a moment Tookhees' nose and eyes appeared in his doorway, his whiskers twitching nervously as he smelled the candle grease. But he was suspicious of the big object, or perhaps he smelled the man too and was afraid, for after much dodging in and out he disappeared altogether.

I was wondering how long his hunger would battle with his caution, when I saw the moss near my bait stir from beneath. A little waving of the moss blossoms, and Tookhees' nose and eyes appeared out of the ground for an instant, sniffing in all directions. His little scheme was evident enough now; he was tunneling for the morsel that he dared not take openly. I watched with breathless interest as a faint quiver nearer my bait showed where he was pushing his works. Then the moss stirred cautiously close beside his objective; a hole opened; the morsel tumbled in, and Tookhees was gone with his prize.

I placed more crumbs from my pocket in the same place, and presently three or four mice were nibbling them. One sat up close by the dead brake, holding a bit of bread in his forepaws like a squirrel. The brake stirred suddenly; before he could jump my hand closed over him, and slipping the other hand beneath him I held him up to my face to watch him between my fingers. He made no movement to escape, but only trembled violently. His legs seemed too weak to support his weight now; he lay down; his eyes closed. One convulsive twitch and he was dead — dead of fright in a hand which had not harmed him.

It was at this colony, whose members were all strangers to me, that I learned in a peculiar way of the visiting habits of wood mice, and at the same time another lesson that I shall not soon forget. For several days I had been trying every legitimate way in vain to catch a big trout, a monster of his kind, that lived in an eddy behind a rock up at the inlet. Trout were scarce in that lake, and in summer the big fish are always lazy and hard to catch. I was trout hungry most of the time, for the fish that I caught were small, and few and far between. Several times, however, when casting from the shore at the inlet for small fish, I had seen swirls in a great eddy near

the farther shore, which told me plainly of big fish beneath; and one day, when a huge trout rolled half his length out of water behind my fly, small fry lost all their interest and I promised myself the joy of feeling my rod bend and tingle beneath the rush of that big trout if it took all summer.

Flies were no use. I offered him a bookful, every variety of shape and color, at dawn and dusk, without tempting him. I tried grubs, which bass like, and a frog's leg, which no pickerel can resist, and little frogs, such as big trout hunt among the lily pads in the twilight,—all without pleasing him. And then water-beetles, and a red squirrel's tail-tip, which makes the best hackle in the world, and kicking grasshoppers, and a silver spoon with a wicked "gang" of hooks, which I detest and which, I am thankful to remember, the trout detested also. They lay there in their big cool eddy, lazily taking what food the stream brought down to them, giving no heed to frauds of any kind.

Then I caught a red-fin in the stream above, hooked it securely, laid it on a big chip, coiled my line upon it, and set it floating down stream, the line uncoiling gently behind it as it went. When it reached the eddy I raised my rod tip; the line straightened; the red-fin plunged overboard, and a

two-pound trout, thinking, no doubt, that the little fellow had been hiding under the chip, rose for him and took him in. That was the only one I caught. His struggle disturbed the pool, and the other trout gave no heed to more red-fins.

Then, one morning at daybreak, as I sat on a big rock pondering new baits and devices, a stir on an alder bush across the stream caught my eye. Tookhees the wood mouse was there, running over the bush, evidently for the black catkins which still clung to the tips. As I watched him he fell, or jumped from his branch into the quiet water below and, after circling about for a moment, headed bravely across the current. I could just see his nose as he swam, a rippling wedge against the black water with a widening letter V trailing out behind him. The current swept him downward; he touched the edge of the big eddy; there was a swirl, a mighty plunge beneath, and Tookhees was gone, leaving no trace but a swift circle of ripples that were swallowed up in the rings and dimples behind the rock.— I had found what bait the big trout wanted.

Hurrying back to camp, I loaded a cartridge lightly with a pinch of dust shot, spread some crumbs near the big log behind my tent, squeaked the call a few times, and sat down to wait. "These mice are

strangers to me," I told Conscience, who was protesting a little, "and the woods are full of them, and I want that trout."

In a moment there was a rustle in the mossy doorway and Tookhees appeared. He darted across the open, seized a crumb in his mouth, sat up on his hind legs, took the crumb in his paws, and began to eat. I had raised the gun, thinking he would dodge back a few times before giving me a shot; his boldness surprised me, but I did not recognize him. Still my eye followed along the barrels and over the sight to where Tookhees sat eating his crumb. My finger was pressing the trigger — "O you big butcher," said Conscience, "think how little he is, and what a big roar your gun will make! Aren't you ashamed?"

"But I want the trout," I protested.

"Catch him then, without killing this little harmless thing," said Conscience sternly.

"But he is a stranger to me; I never" —

"He is eating your bread and salt," said Conscience. That settled it; but even as I looked at him over the gun sight, Tookhees finished his crumb, came to my foot, ran along my leg into my lap, and looked into my face expectantly. The grizzled coat and the split ear showed the welcome guest at my table for a week past. He was visiting the stranger colony, as wood

mice are fond of doing, and persuading them by his example that they might trust me, as he did. More ashamed than if I had been caught potting quail, I threw away the hateful shell that had almost slain my friend and went back to camp.

There I made a mouse of a bit of muskrat fur, with a piece of my leather shoestring sewed on for a tail. It served the purpose perfectly, for within the hour I was gloating over the size and beauty of the big trout as he stretched his length on the rock beside me. But I lost the fraud at the next cast, leaving it, with a foot of my leader, in the mouth of a second trout that rolled up at it the instant it touched his eddy behind the rock.

After that the wood mice were safe so far as I was concerned. Not a trout, though he were big as a salmon, would ever taste them, unless they chose to go swimming of their own accord; and I kept their table better supplied than before. I saw much of their visiting back and forth, and have understood better what those tunnels mean that one finds in the spring when the last snows are melting. In a corner of the woods, where the drifts lay, you will often find a score of tunnels coming in from all directions to a central chamber. They speak of Tookhees' sociable nature, of his long visits with his fellows,

undisturbed by swoop or snap, when the packed snow above has swept the summer fear away and made him safe from hawk and owl and fox and wildcat, and when no open water tempts him to go swimming where Skooktum the big trout lies waiting, mouse hungry, under his eddy.

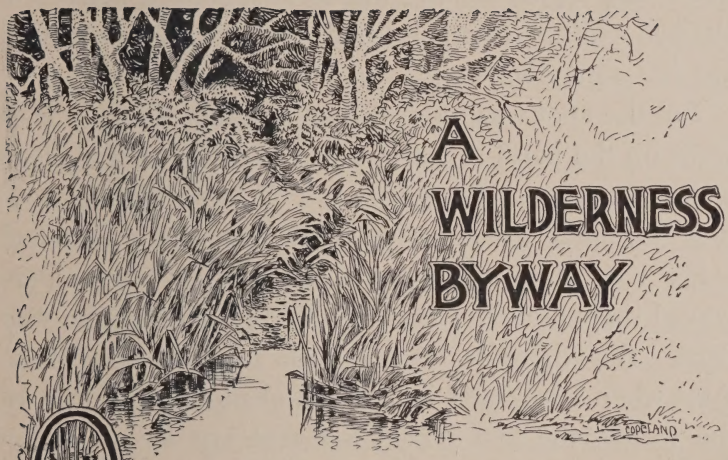
The weeks passed all too quickly, as wilderness weeks do, and the sad task of breaking camp lay just before us. But one thing troubled me — the little Tookhees, who knew no fear, but tried to make a nest in the sleeve of my flannel shirt. His simple confidence touched me more than the curious ways of all the other mice. Every day he came and took his crumbs, not from the common table, but from my hand, evidently enjoying its warmth while he ate, and always getting the choicest morsels. But I knew that he would be the first one caught by the owl after I left; for it is fear only that saves the wild things. Occasionally one finds animals of various kinds in which the instinct of fear is lacking — a frog, a young partridge, a moose calf — and wonders what golden age that knew no fear, or what glorious vision of Isaiah in which lion and lamb lie down together, is here set forth. I have even seen a young black duck, whose natural disposition is wild as the

wilderness itself, that had profited nothing by his mother's alarms and her constant lessons in hiding, but came bobbing up to my canoe among the sedges of a wilderness lake, while his brethren crouched invisible in their coverts of bending rushes, and his mother flapped wildly off, splashing and quacking and trailing a wing to draw me away from the little ones.

Such an one is generally abandoned by its mother, or else is the first to fall in the battle with the strong before she gives him up as hopeless. Little Tookhees evidently belonged to this class, so before leaving I undertook the task of teaching him fear, which had evidently been too much for Nature and his own mother. I pinched him a few times, hooting like an owl as I did so, — a startling process, which sent the other mice diving like brown streaks to cover. Then I waved a branch over him, like a hawk's wing, at the same time flipping him end over end, shaking him up terribly. Then again, when he appeared with a new light dawning in his eyes, the light of fear, I would set a stick to wiggling like a creeping fox among the ferns and switch him sharply with a hemlock tip. It was a hard lesson, but he learned it after a few days. And before I finished the teaching, not a mouse would come to my table, no matter how

persuasively I squeaked. They would dart about in the twilight as of yore, but the first whish of my stick sent them all back to cover on the instant.

That was their stern yet practical preparation for the robber horde that would soon be prowling over my camping ground. Then a stealthy movement among the ferns or the sweep of a shadow among the twilight shadows would mean a very different thing from wriggling stick and waving hemlock tip. Snap and swoop, and teeth and claws, — jump for your life and find out afterwards. That is the rule for a wise wood mouse. So I said good-by, and left them to take care of themselves in the wilderness.



ONE day in the wilderness, as my canoe was sweeping down a beautiful stretch of river, I noticed a little path leading through the water grass, at right angles to the stream's course. Swinging my canoe up to it, I found what seemed to be a landing place for the wood folk on their river journeyings. The sedges, which stood thickly all about, were here bent inward, making a shiny green channel from the river.

On the muddy shore were many tracks of mink and muskrat and otter. Here a big moose had stood drinking; and there a beaver had cut the grass and made a little mud pie, in the middle of which was a bit of musk scenting the whole neighborhood. It was

done last night, for the marks of his fore paws still showed plainly where he had patted his pie smooth ere he went away.

But the spot was more than a landing place; a path went up the bank into the woods, as faint as the green waterway among the sedges. Tall ferns bent over to hide it; rank grasses that had been softly brushed aside tried their best to look natural; the alders waved their branches thickly, saying: There is no way here. But there it was, a path for the wood folk. And when I followed it into the shade and silence of the woods, the first mossy log that lay across it was worn smooth by the passage of many little feet.

As I came back, Simmo's canoe glided into sight and I waved him to shore. The light birch swung up beside mine, a deep water-dimple just under the curl of its bow, and a musical ripple like the gurgle of water by a mossy stone — that was the only sound.

"What means this path, Simmo?"

His keen eyes took in everything at a glance, the wavy waterway, the tracks, the faint path to the alders. There was a look of surprise in his face that I had blundered onto a discovery which he had looked for many times in vain, his traps on his back.

"Das a portash," he said simply.

"A portage! But who made a portage here?"

"Well, Musquash he prob'ly make-um first. Den beaver, den h'otter, den everybody in hurry he make-um. You see, river make big bend here. Portash go 'cross; save time, jus' same Indian portash."

That was the first of a dozen such paths that I have since found cutting across the bends of wilderness rivers, — the wood folk's way of saving time on a journey. I left Simmo to go on down the river, while I followed the little byway curiously. There is nothing more fascinating in the woods than to go on the track of the wild things and see what they have been doing.

But alas! mine were not the first human feet that had taken the journey. Halfway across, at a point where the path ran over a little brook, I found a deadfall set squarely in the way of unwary feet. It was different from any I had ever seen, and was made like this:

That tiny stick (trigger, the trappers call it) with its end resting in air three inches above the bed log, just the right height so that a beaver or an otter would naturally put his foot on it in crossing, looks innocent enough. But if you look sharply you will see that if it were pressed down ever so little it would instantly release the bent stick that holds the fall-log, and bring the deadly thing down with crushing force across the back of any animal beneath.

Such are the pitfalls that lie athwart the way of Keeonekh the otter, when he goes a-courting and uses Musquash's portage to shorten his journey.

At the other end of the portage I waited for Simmo to come round the bend, and took him back to see the work, denouncing the heartless carelessness of the trapper who had gone away in the spring and left an unsprung deadfall as a menace to the wild things. At the first glance he pronounced it an otter trap. Then the fear and wonder swept into his face, and the questions into mine.

"Das Noel Waby's trap. Nobody else make-um tukpeel stick like dat," he said at last.

Then I understood. Noel Waby had gone up river trapping in the spring, and had never come back; nor any word to tell how death met him.

I stooped down to examine the trap with greater interest. On the underside of the fall-log I found some long hairs still clinging in the crevices of the rough bark. They belonged to the outer waterproof coat with which Keeonekh keeps his fur dry. One otter at least had been caught here, and the trap reset. But some sense of danger, some old scent of blood or subtle warning clung to the spot, and no other creature had crossed the bed log, though hundreds must have passed that way since the old Indian reset his trap, and strode away with the dead otter across his shoulders.

What was it in the air? What sense of fear brooded here and whispered in the alder leaves and tinkled in the brook? Simmo grew uneasy and hurried away. He was like the wood folk. But I sat down on a great log that the spring floods had driven in through the alders to feel the meaning of the place, if possible, and to have the vast sweet solitude all to myself for a little while.

A faint stir on my left, and another! Then up the path, twisting and gliding, came Keeonekh, the first otter that I had ever seen in the wilderness. Where the sun flickered in through the alder leaves it glinted brightly on the shiny outer hairs of his rough coat. As he went his nose worked constantly,

going far ahead of his bright little eyes to tell him what was in the path.

I was sitting very still, some distance to one side, and he did not see me. Near old Noel's deadfall he paused an instant with raised head, in the curious snake-like attitude that all the weasels take when watching. Then he glided round the end of the trap, and disappeared down the portage.

When he was gone I stole out to examine his tracks. Then I noticed for the first time that the old path near the deadfall was getting moss-grown; a faint new path began to show among the alders. Some warning was there in the trap, and with cunning instinct all the wood dwellers turned aside, giving a wide berth to what they felt was dangerous but could not understand. The new path joined the old again, beyond the brook, and followed it straight to the river.

Again I examined the deadfall carefully, but of course I found nothing. That is a matter of instinct, not of eyes and ears, and it is past finding out. Then I went away for good, after driving a ring of stout stakes all about the trap to keep heedless little feet out of it. But I left it unsprung, just as it was, a rude tribute of remembrance to Keeonekh and the lost Indian.

KEEONEKH THE FISHERMAN

WHEREVER you find Keeonekh the otter you find three other things: wildness, beauty, and running water that no winter can freeze. There is also good fishing, but that will profit you little; for after Keeonekh has harried a pool it is useless to cast your fly or minnow there. The largest fish has disappeared — you will find his bones and a fin or two on the ice or the nearest bank — and the little fish are still in hiding after their fright.

Conversely, wherever you find the three elements mentioned you will also find Keeonekh, if your eyes know how to read the signs aright. Even in places near the towns, where no otter has been seen for generations, they are still to be found leading their shy wild life, so familiar with every sight and sound of

danger that no eye of the many that pass by ever sees them. No animal has been more persistently trapped and hunted for the valuable fur that he bears; but Keeonekh is hard to catch and quick to learn. When a family have all been caught or driven away from a favorite stream, another otter speedily finds the spot in some of his winter wanderings after better fishing, and, knowing well from the signs that others of his race have paid the sad penalty for heedlessness, he settles down there with greater watchfulness, and enjoys his fisherman's luck.

In the spring he brings a mate to share his rich living. Soon a family of young otters go a-fishing in the best pools and explore the stream for miles up and down. But so shy and wild and quick to hide are they that the trout fishermen who follow the river, and the ice fishermen who set their tilt-ups in the pond below, and the children who gather cowslips in the spring have no suspicion that the original proprietors of the stream are still on the spot, jealously watching and resenting every intrusion.

Occasionally the wood choppers cross an unknown trail in the snow, a heavy trail, with long, sliding, down-hill plunges which look as if a log had been dragged along. But they too go their way, wondering a bit at the queer things that live in the woods,

but not understanding the plain records that the queer things leave behind them. Did they but follow far enough they would find the end of the trail in open water, and on the ice beyond the signs of Keeonekh's fishing.

I remember one otter family whose den I found, when a boy, on a stream between two ponds within three miles of the town house. Yet the oldest hunter could barely remember the time when the last otter had been caught or seen in the county.

I was sitting very still in the bushes on the bank, one day in spring, watching for a wood duck. Wood duck lived there, but the cover was so thick that I could never surprise them. They always heard me coming and were off, giving me only vanishing glimpses among the trees, or else quietly hiding until I went by. So the only way to see them — a beautiful sight they were — was to sit still in hiding, for hours if need be, until they came gliding by, all unconscious of the watcher.

As I waited a large animal came swiftly up stream, just his head visible, with a long tail trailing behind. He was swimming powerfully, steadily, straight as a string; but, as I noted with wonder, he made no ripple whatever, sliding through the water as if greased from nose to tail. Just above me he dived, and I did not

see him again, though I watched up and down stream breathlessly for him to reappear.

I had never seen such an animal before, but I knew somehow that it was an otter, and I drew back into better hiding with the hope of seeing the rare creature again. Presently another otter appeared, coming up stream and disappearing in exactly the same way as the first. But though I stayed all the afternoon I saw nothing more.

After that I haunted the spot every time I could get away, creeping down to the river bank and lying in hiding hours long at a stretch; for I knew now that the otters lived there, and they gave me many glimpses of a life I had never seen before.

Soon I found their den. It was in a bank opposite my hiding place, and the entrance was among the roots of a great tree, under water, where no one could have possibly found it if the otters had not themselves shown the way. In their approach they always dived while yet well out in the stream, and so entered their door unseen. When they came out they were quite as careful, always swimming some distance under water before coming to the surface. It was several days before my eye could trace surely the faint undulation of the water above them, and so follow their course to their doorway. Had not the water been

shallow I should never have found it; for they are the most wonderful of swimmers, making no ripple on the surface, and not half the disturbance below it that a fish of the same weight makes.

Those were among the happiest watching hours that I have ever spent in the woods. The game was so large, so utterly unexpected; and I had the wonderful discovery all to myself. Not one of the half dozen boys and men who occasionally, when the fever seized them, trapped muskrat in the big meadow, a mile below, or the rare mink that hunted frogs in the brook, had any suspicion that such splendid fur was to be had for the hunting.

Sometimes a whole afternoon would go slowly by, filled with the sounds and sweet smells of the woods, and not a ripple would break the dimples of the stream before me. But when, one late afternoon, just as the pines across the stream began to darken against the western light, a string of silver bubbles shot across the stream and a big otter rose to the surface with a pickerel in his mouth, all the watching that had not well repaid itself was swept out of the reckoning. He came swiftly towards me, put his fore paws against the bank, gave a wriggling jump,—and there he was, not twenty feet away, holding the pickerel down with his fore paws, his back arched like a frightened cat, and a

tiny stream of water trickling down from the tip of his heavy pointed tail, as he ate his fish with immense relish.

Years afterward, hundreds of miles away on the Dungarvon, in the heart of the wilderness, every detail of the scene came back to me again. I was standing on snowshoes, looking out over the frozen river, when Keeonekh appeared in an open pool with a trout in his mouth. He broke his way, with a clattering tinkle of winter bells, through the thin edge of ice, put his paws against the heavy snow ice, threw himself out with the same wriggling jump, and ate with his back arched — just as I had seen him years before.

This curious way of eating is, I think, characteristic of all otters; certainly of those that I have been fortunate enough to see. Why they do it is more than I know; but it must be uncomfortable for every mouthful — full of fish bones, too — to slide uphill to one's stomach. Perhaps it is mere habit, which shows in the arched backs of all the weasel family. Perhaps it is to frighten any enemy that may approach unawares while Keeonekh is eating, just as an owl, when feeding on the ground, bristles up all his feathers so as to look as big as possible.

But my first otter was too keen-scented to remain long so near a concealed enemy. Suddenly he stopped

eating and turned his head in my direction. I could see his nostrils twitching as the wind gave him its message. Then he left his fish, glided into the stream as noiselessly as the brook entered it below him, and disappeared without leaving a single wavelet to show where he had gone down.

When the young otters appeared, there was one of the most interesting lessons to be seen in the woods. Though Keeonekh loves the water and lives in it more than half the time, his little ones are afraid of it as so many kittens. If left to themselves they would undoubtedly go off for a hunting life, following the old family instinct; for fishing is an acquired habit of the otters, and so the fishing instinct cannot yet be transmitted to the little ones. That will take many generations. Meanwhile the little Keeonekhs must be taught to swim.

One day the mother-otter appeared on the bank among the roots of the great tree under which was their secret doorway. That was surprising, for up to this time both otters had always approached it from the river, and were never seen on the bank near their den. She appeared to be digging, but was immensely cautious about it, looking, listening, sniffing continually. I had never gone near the place for fear of frightening them away; and it was months afterward,

when the den was deserted, before I examined it to understand just what she was doing. Then I found that she had made another doorway from her den leading out to the bank. She had selected the spot with wonderful cunning, — a hollow under a great root that would never be noticed, — and she dug from inside, carrying the earth down to the river bottom, so that there should be nothing about the tree to indicate the haunt of an animal.

Long afterwards, when I had grown better acquainted with Keeonekh's ways from much watching, I understood the meaning of all this. She was simply making a safe way out and in for the little ones, who were afraid of the water. Had she taken or driven them out of her own entrance under the river, they might easily have drowned ere they reached the surface.

When the entrance was all ready she disappeared, but I have no doubt she was just inside, watching to be sure the coast was clear. Slowly her head and neck appeared till they showed clear of the black roots. She turned her nose up stream — nothing in the wind. Eyes and ears searched below — nothing harmful there. Then she came out, and after her toddled two little otters, full of wonder at the big bright world, full of fear at the river.

There was no play at first, only wonder and investigation. Caution was born in them; they put their little feet down as if treading on eggs, and they sniffed every bush before going behind it. And the old mother noted their cunning with satisfaction while her own nose and ears watched far away.

The outing was all too short; some uneasiness was in the air down stream. Suddenly she rose from where she was lying, and the little ones, as if commanded, tumbled back into the den. In a moment she had glided after them, and the bank was deserted. It was fully ten minutes before my untrained ears caught faint sounds, which were not of the woods, coming up stream; and longer than that before two men with fish poles appeared, making their slow way to the pond above. They passed almost over the den and disappeared, all unconscious of beast or man that wished them elsewhere, resenting their noisy passage through the solitudes. But the otters did not come out again, though I watched till nearly dark.

It was a week before I saw them again, and some good teaching had evidently been done in the meantime; for all fear of the river was gone. They toddled out as before, at the same hour in the afternoon, and went straight to the bank. There the mother lay down, and the little ones, as if enjoying the frolic,

clambered up to her back. Whereupon she slid into the stream and swam slowly about with the little Keeonekhs clinging to her desperately, as if humpty-dumpty had been played on them before, and might be repeated any moment.

I understood their air of anxious expectation a moment later, when Mother Otter dived like a flash from under them, leaving them to make their own way in the water. They began to swim naturally enough, but the fear of the new element was still upon them. The moment old Mother Otter appeared they made for her whimpering, but she dived again and again, or moved slowly away, and so kept them swimming. After a little they seemed to tire and lose courage. Her eyes saw it quicker than mine, and she glided between them. Both little ones turned in at the same instant and found a resting place on her back. So she brought them carefully to land again, and in a few moments they were all rolling about in the dry leaves like so many puppies.

I must confess here that, besides the boy's wonder in watching the wild things, another interest brought me to the river bank and kept me studying Keeonekh's ways. Father Otter was a big fellow, — enormous he seemed to me, thinking of my mink skins, — and occasionally, when his rich coat glinted in the sunshine, I

was thinking what a famous cap it would make for the winter woods, or for coasting on moonshiny nights. More often I was thinking what famous things a boy could buy for the fourteen dollars, at least, which his pelt would bring in the open market.

The first Saturday after I saw him I prepared a board, ten times bigger than a mink-stretcher, and tapered one end to a round point, and split it, and made a wedge, and smoothed it all down, and hid it away — to stretch the big otter's skin upon when I should catch him.

When November came, and fur was prime, I carried down a half-bushel basket of heads and stuff from the fish market, and piled them up temptingly on the bank, above a little water path, in a lonely spot by the river. At the lower end of the path, where it came out of the water, I set a trap, my biggest one, with a famous grip for skunks and woodchucks. But the fish rotted away, as did also another basketful in another place. Whatever was eaten went to the crows and mink. Keeonekh disdained it.

Then I set the trap in some water (to kill the smell of it) on a game path among some swamp alders, at a bend of the river where nobody ever came and where I had found Keeonekh's tracks. The next night he walked into it. But the trap that was sure grip for

woodchucks was a plaything for Keeonekh's strength. He wrenched his foot out of it, leaving me only a few glistening hairs — which was all I ever caught of him.

Years afterward, when I found old Noel's trap on Keeonekh's portage, I asked Simmo why no bait had been used.

"No good use-um bait," he said, "Keeonekh like-um fresh fish, an' catch-um self all he want." And that is true. Except in starvation times, when even the pools are frozen, or the fish die from one of their mysterious epidemics, Keeonekh turns up his nose at any bait. If a bit of castor is put in a split stick, he will turn aside, like all the fur-bearers, to see what this strange smell is. But if you would toll him with a bait, you must fasten a fish in the water in such a way that it seems alive as the current wiggles it, else Keeonekh will never think it worthy of his catching.

The den in the river bank was never disturbed, and the following year another litter was raised there. With characteristic cunning — a cunning which grows keener and keener in the neighborhood of civilization — the mother-otter filled up the land entrance among the roots with earth and driftweed, using only the doorway under water until it was time for the cubs to come out into the world again.

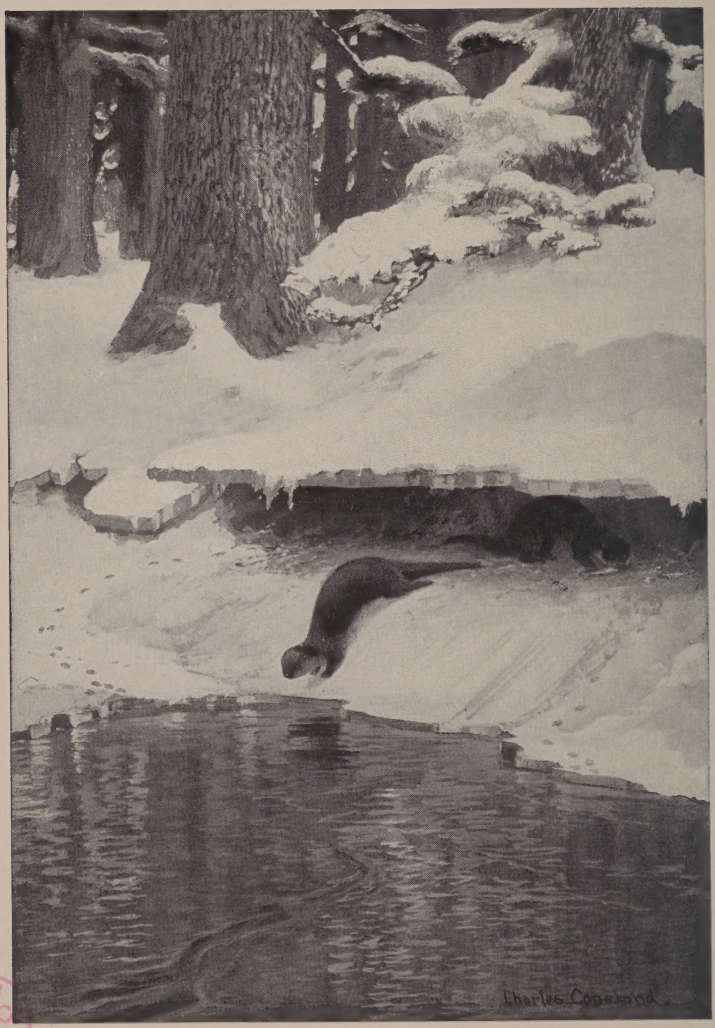
Of all the creatures of the wilderness Keeonekh is the most richly gifted, and his ways, could we but search them out, would furnish a most interesting chapter. Every journey he takes, whether by land or water, is full of unknown traits and tricks; but unfortunately no one ever sees him doing things, and most of his ways are yet to be found out. You see a head holding swiftly across a wilderness lake, or coming to

meet your canoe on the streams; then, as you follow eagerly, a swirl and he is gone. When he comes up again he will watch you so much more keenly than you can possibly watch him that you learn little about him, except how shy he is. Even the trappers who make a business of catching him, and with whom I have often talked, know almost nothing of Keeonekh, except where to set their traps for him living and how to care for his skin when he is dead.

Once I saw him fishing in a curious way. It was winter, on a wilderness stream flowing into the Dungarvon. There had been a fall of dry snow that still lay deep and powdery over all the woods, too light to settle or crust. At every step one had to lift a shovelful of the stuff on the point of his snowshoe; and I was tired out, following some caribou that wandered like plover in the rain.

Just below me was a deep open pool surrounded by double fringes of ice. Early in the winter, while the stream was higher, the white ice had formed thickly on the river wherever the current was not too swift for freezing. Then the stream fell, and a shelf of new black ice formed at the water's level, eighteen inches or more below the first ice, some of which still clung to the banks, reaching out in places two or three feet and forming dark caverns with the ice below. Both shelves dipped towards the water, forming a gentle incline all about the edges of the open places.

A string of silver bubbles shooting across the black pool at my feet roused me out of a drowsy weariness. There it was again, a rippling wave across the pool, which rose to the surface a moment later in a hundred bubbles, tinkling like tiny bells as they broke in the keen air. Two or three times I saw it with growing



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With back humped against the ice above him, eating his catch

wonder. Then something stirred under the shelf of ice across the pool. An otter slid into the water; the rippling wave shot across again; the bubbles broke at the surface; and I knew that he was sitting under the white ice below me, not twenty feet away.

A whole family of otters, three or four of them, were fishing there at my feet in utter unconsciousness. The discovery took my breath away. Every little while the bubbles would shoot across from my side, and watching sharply I would see Keeonekh slide out upon the lower shelf of ice on the other side and crouch there in the gloom, with back humped against the ice above him, eating his catch. The fish they caught were all small evidently, for after a few minutes he would throw himself flat on the ice, slide down the incline into the water, making no splash or disturbance as he entered, and the string of bubbles would shoot across to my side again.

For a full hour I watched them breathlessly, marveling at their skill. A small fish is nimble game to follow and catch in his own element. But at every slide Keeonekh did it. Sometimes the rippling wave would shoot all over the pool, and the bubbles break in a wild tangle as the fish darted and doubled below, with the otter after him. But it always ended the same way. Keeonekh would slide out upon the ice

shelf, and hump his back, and begin to eat almost before the last bubble had tinkled behind him.

Curiously enough, the rule of the salmon fishermen prevailed here in the wilderness: no two rods shall whip the same pool at the same time. I would see an otter lying ready on the ice, evidently waiting for the chase to end. Then, as another otter slid out beside him with his fish, in he would go like a flash and take his turn. For a while the pool was a lively place; the bubbles had no rest. Then the plunges grew fewer and fewer, and the otters all disappeared into the ice caverns.

What became of them I could not make out; and I was too chilled to watch longer. Above and below the pool the stream was frozen for a distance; then there was more open water and more fishing. Whether they followed along the bank under cover of the ice to other pools, or simply slept where they were till hungry again, I never found out. Certainly they had taken up their abode in an ideal spot, and would not leave it willingly. The open pools gave excellent fishing, and the upper ice shelf protected them perfectly from all enemies.

Once, a week later, I left the caribou and came back to the spot to watch awhile; but the place was deserted. The black water gurgled and dimpled

across the pool, and slipped away silently under the lower edge of ice undisturbed by strings of silver bubbles. The ice caverns were all dark and silent. The mink had stolen the fish heads, and there was no trace anywhere to show that it was Keeonekh's banquet hall.

The swimming power of an otter, which was so evident there in the winter pool, is one of the most remarkable things in nature. All other animals and birds, and even the best modeled of modern boats, leave more or less wake behind them when moving through the water. But Keeonekh leaves no more trail than a fish. This is partly because he keeps his body well submerged when swimming, partly because of the strong, deep, even stroke that drives him forward. Sometimes I have wondered if the outer hairs of his coat—the waterproof covering that keeps his fur dry, no matter how long he swims—are not better oiled than in other animals, which might account for the lack of ripple. I have seen him go down suddenly and leave absolutely no break in the surface to show where he was. When sliding also, plunging down a twenty-foot clay bank, he enters the water with an astonishing lack of noise or disturbance of any kind.

In swimming at the surface he seems to use all four feet, like other animals. But below the surface, when

chasing fish, he uses only the fore paws. The hind legs then stretch straight out behind and are used, with the heavy tail, for a great rudder. By this means he turns and doubles like a flash, following surely the swift dartings of frightened trout, and beating them by sheer speed and nimbleness.

When fishing a pool he always hunts outward from the center, driving the fish towards the bank, keeping himself within their circlings, and so having the immense advantage of the shorter line in heading off his game. The fish are seized as they crouch against the bank for protection, or try to dart out past him. Large fish are frequently caught from behind as they lie resting in their spring-holes. So swift and noiseless is his approach that they are seized before they become aware of danger.

This swimming power of Keeonekh is all the more astonishing when one remembers that he is distinctively a land animal, with none of the special endowments of the seal, who is his only rival as a fisherman. Nature undoubtedly intended him to get his living, as the other members of his large family do, by hunting in the woods, and endowed him accordingly. He is a strong runner, a good climber, a patient tireless hunter, and his nose is keen as a brier. With a little practice he could again get his living by hunting, as his

ancestors did. If squirrels and rats and rabbits were too nimble at first, there are plenty of musquash to be caught, and he need not stop at a fawn or a sheep, for he is enormously strong, and the grip of his jaws is not to be loosened.

In severe winters, when fish are scarce or his pools frozen over, he takes to the woods boldly and shows himself a master at hunting craft. But he likes fish, and likes the water, and for many generations now has been simply a fisherman, with many of the quiet lovable traits that belong to fishermen in general.

That is one thing to give you instant sympathy for Keeonekh—he is so different, so far above all other members of his tribe. He is very gentle by nature, with no trace of the fisher's ferocity or the weasel's bloodthirstiness. He tames easily, and makes the most docile and affectionate pet of all the wood folk. He never kills for the sake of killing, but lives peaceably, so far as he can, with all creatures. And he stops fishing when he has caught his dinner. He is also most cleanly in his habits, with no suggestion whatever of the evil odors that cling to the mink and defile the whole neighborhood of a skunk. One cannot help wondering whether just going fishing has not wrought all this wonder in Keeonekh's disposition. If so, 't is a pity that all his tribe do not turn fishermen.

His one enemy among the wood folk, so far as I have observed, is the beaver. As the latter is also a peaceable animal, it is difficult to account for the hostility. I have heard or read somewhere that Keeonekh is fond of young beaver and hunts them occasionally to vary his diet of fish; but I have never found any evidence in the wilderness to show this. Instead, I think it is simply a matter of the beaver's dam and pond that causes the trouble.

When the dam is built the beavers often dig a channel around either end to carry off the surplus water, and so prevent their handiwork being washed away in a freshet. Then the beavers guard their preserve jealously, driving away the wood folk that dare to cross their dam or enter their ponds, especially the musquash, who is apt to burrow and cause them no end of trouble. But Keeonekh, secure in his strength, holds straight through the pond, minding his own business and even taking a fish or two in the deep places near the dam. He delights also in running water, especially in winter when lakes and streams are mostly frozen, and in his journeyings he makes use of the open channels that guard the beavers' work. But the moment the beavers hear a splashing there, or note a disturbance in the pond

where Keeonekh is chasing fish, down they come full of wrath. And there is generally a desperate fight before the affair is settled.

Once, on a little pond, I saw a fierce battle going on out in the middle, and paddled hastily to find out about it. Two beavers and a big otter were locked in a death struggle, diving, plunging, throwing themselves out of water, and snapping at each other's throats.

As my canoe halted the otter gripped one of his antagonists and went under with him. There was a terrible commotion below the surface for a few moments. When it ended the beaver rolled up dead, and Keeonekh shot up under the second beaver to repeat the attack. They gripped on the instant, but the second beaver, an enormous fellow, refused to go under where he would be at a disadvantage. In my eagerness I let the canoe drift almost upon them, driving them wildly apart before the common danger. The otter held on his way up the lake; the beaver turned towards the shore, where I noticed for the first time a couple of beaver houses.

In this case there was no chance for intrusion on Keeonekh's part. He had probably been attacked when going peaceably about his business through the lake.

It is barely possible, however, that there was an old grievance on the beavers' part, which they sought to square when they caught Keeonekh on the lake. When beavers build their houses on the lake shore, without the necessity for making a dam, they generally build a tunnel slanting up from the lake's bed to their den or house on the bank. Now Keeonekh fishes under the ice in winter more than is generally supposed. As he must breathe after every chase he must needs know all the air-holes and dens in the whole lake. No matter how much he turns and doubles in the chase after a trout, he never loses his sense of direction, never forgets where the breathing places are. When his fish is seized he makes a bee line under the ice for the nearest place where he can breathe and eat. Sometimes this lands him, out of breath, in the beaver's tunnel; and the beaver must sit upstairs in his own house, nursing his wrath, while Keeonekh eats fish in his hallway; for there is not room for both at once in the tunnel, and a fight there or under the ice is out of the question. As the beaver eats only bark — the white inner layer of "popple" bark is his chief dainty — he cannot understand and cannot tolerate this barbarian, who eats raw fish and leaves the bones and fins and the smell of slime in his doorway. The beaver is exemplary in

his neatness, detesting all smells and filth; and this may possibly account for some of his enmity and his savage attacks upon Keeonekh when he catches him in a good place.

Not the least interesting of Keeonekh's queer ways is his habit of sliding down hill, which makes a bond of sympathy and brings him close to the boyhood memories of those who know him.

I remember one pair of otters that I watched for the better part of a sunny afternoon sliding down a clay bank with endless delight. The slide had been made, with much care evidently, on the steep side of a little promontory that jutted into the river. It was very steep, about twenty feet high, and had been made perfectly smooth by much sliding and wetting-down. An otter would appear at the top of the bank, throw himself forward on his belly and shoot downward like a flash, diving deep under water and reappearing some distance out from the foot of the slide. And all this with marvelous stillness, as if the very woods had ears and were listening to betray the shy creatures at their fun. For it was fun, pure and simple, and fun with no end of tingle and excitement in it, especially when one tried to catch the other and shot into the water at his very heels.

This slide was in perfect condition, and the otters were careful not to roughen it. They never scrambled up over it, but went round the point and climbed from the other side, or else went up parallel to the slide, some distance away, where the ascent was easier and where there was no danger of rolling stones or sticks upon the coasting ground to spoil its smoothness.

In winter the snow makes better coasting than the clay. Moreover it soon grows hard and icy from the freezing of the water left by the otter's body, and after a few days the slide is as smooth as glass. Then coasting is perfect, and every otter, old and young, has his favorite slide and spends part of every pleasant day enjoying the fun.

When traveling through the woods in deep snow, Keeonekh makes use of his sliding habit to help him along, especially on down grades. He runs a little way and throws himself forward on his belly, sliding through the snow for several feet before he runs again. So his progress is a series of slides, much as one hurries along in slippery weather.

I have spoken of the silver bubbles that first drew my attention to the fishing otters one day in the wilderness. From the few rare opportunities that I have had to watch them, I think that the bubbles are

seen only after Keeonekh slides swiftly into the stream. The air clings to the hairs of his rough outer coat and is brushed from them as he passes through the water. One who watches him thus, shooting down the long slide belly-bump into the black winter pool, with a string of silver bubbles breaking and tinkling above him, is apt to know the hunter's change of heart from the touch of Nature which makes us all kin. Thereafter he eschews trapping — at least you will not find his number-three trap at the foot of Keeonekh's slide any more, to turn the shy creature's happiness into tragedy — and he sends a hearty good-luck after his fellow-fisherman, whether he meet him on the wilderness lakes or in the quiet places on the home streams where nobody ever comes.

KOSKOMENOS THE OUTCAST

KOSKOMENOS the kingfisher is a kind of outcast among the birds. I think they regard him as a half reptile, who has not yet climbed high enough in the bird scale to deserve recognition; so they let him severely alone. Even the goshawk hesitates before taking a swoop at him, not knowing quite whether the gaudy creature is dangerous or only uncanny. I saw a great hawk once drop like a bolt upon a kingfisher that hung on quivering wings, rattling softly, before his hole in the bank. But the robber lost his nerve at the instant when he should have dropped his claws to strike. He swerved aside and shot upward in a great slant to a dead spruce top, where he stood watching intently till the dark

beak of a brooding kingfisher reached out of the hole to receive the fish that her mate had brought her. Whereupon Koskomenos swept away to his watchtower above the minnow pool, and the hawk set his wings toward the outlet, where a brood of young sheldrakes were taking their first lessons in the open water.

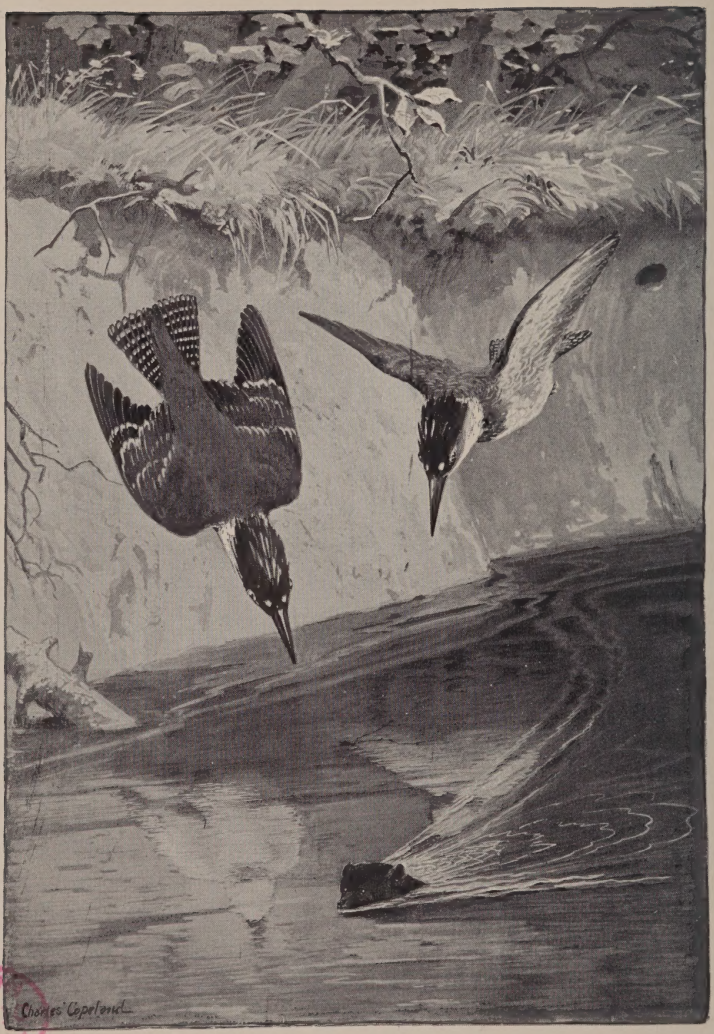
No wonder the birds look askance at Kingfisher. His head is ridiculously large; his feet ridiculously small. He is a poem of grace in the air; but he creeps like a lizard, or waddles so that a duck would be ashamed of him, in the rare moments when he is afoot. His mouth is big enough to take in a minnow whole; his tongue so small that he has no voice, but only a harsh *klr-r-r-r-ik-ik-ik*, like a watchman's rattle. He builds no nest, but rather a den in the bank, in which he lives most filthily half the day; yet the other half he is a clean, beautiful creature, with never a suggestion of earth, but only of the blue heavens above and the color-steeped water below, in his bright garments. Water will not wet him, though he plunge a dozen times out of sight beneath the surface. His clatter is harsh, noisy, diabolical; yet his plunge into the stream, with its flash of color, its silver spray, and its tinkle of smitten water, is the most musical thing in the wilderness.

As a fisherman he has no equal. His fishy, expressionless eye is yet the keenest that sweeps the water, and his swoop puts even the fish-hawk to shame for its certainty and its lightning quickness.

Besides all these contradictions, he is solitary, unknown, inapproachable. He has no youth, no play, no joy except to eat; he associates with nobody, not even with his own kind; and when he catches a fish, and beats its head against a limb till it is dead, and sits with head back-tilted, swallowing his prey, with a clattering chuckle deep down in his throat, he affects you as a parrot does that swears diabolically under his breath as he scratches his head, and that you would gladly shy a stone at, if the owner's back were turned for a sufficient moment.

It is this unknown, this uncanny mixture of bird and reptile that has made the kingfisher an object of superstition among all savage peoples. The legends about him are legion; his crested head is prized by savages above all others as a charm or fetish; and even among civilized peoples his dried body may still sometimes be seen hanging to a pole, in the hope that his bill will point out the quarter from which the next wind will blow.

But Koskomenos has another side, though the world as yet has found out little about it. One day



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So they drove him down stream and out of sight

in the wilderness I cheered him quite involuntarily. It was late afternoon; the fishing was over, and I sat in my canoe watching by a grassy point to see what would happen next. Across the stream was a clay bank, near the top of which a hole as wide as a teacup showed where a pair of kingfishers had dug their long tunnel. "There is nothing for them to stand on there; how did they begin that hole?" I wondered lazily; "and how can they ever raise a brood, with an open door like that for mink and weasel to enter?" Here were two new problems to add to the many unsolved ones which meet you at every turn on the woodland byways.

A movement under the shore stopped my wondering, and the long lithe form of a hunting mink shot swiftly up stream. Under the hole he stopped, raised himself with his fore paws against the bank, twisting his head from side to side and sniffing nervously. "Something good up there," he thought, and began to climb. But the bank was sheer and soft; he slipped back half a dozen times without rising two feet. Then he went down stream to a point where some roots gave him a foothold, and ran lightly up till under the dark eaves that threw their shadowy roots over the clay bank. There he crept cautiously along till his nose found the nest, and slipped down

till his fore paws rested on the threshold. A long hungry sniff of the rank fishy odor that pours out of a kingfisher's den, a keen look all around to be sure the old birds were not returning, and he vanished like a shadow.

"There is one brood of kingfishers the less," I thought, with my glasses focused on the hole. But scarcely was the thought formed, when a fierce rumbling clatter sounded in the bank. The mink shot out, a streak of red showing plainly across his brown face. After him came a kingfisher, clattering out a storm of invectives, and aiding his progress by vicious jabs at his rear. He had made a miscalculation that time; the old mother bird was at home waiting for him, and drove her powerful beak at his evil eye the moment it appeared at the inner end of the tunnel. That took the longing for young kingfisher all out of Cheokhes. He plunged headlong down the bank, the bird swooping after him with a rattling alarm that brought another kingfisher in a twinkling. The mink dived, but it was useless to attempt escape in that way; the keen eyes above followed his flight perfectly. When he came to the surface, twenty feet away, both birds were over him and dropped like plummets on his head. So they drove him down stream and out of sight.

Years afterward I solved the second problem suggested by the kingfisher's den, when I had the good fortune, one day, to watch a pair beginning their tunneling. All who have ever watched the bird have, no doubt, noticed his wonderful ability to stop short in swift flight and hold himself poised in mid-air for an indefinite time, while watching the movements of a minnow beneath. They make use of this ability in beginning their nest on a bank so steep as to afford no foothold.

As I watched the pair referred to, first one then the other would hover before the point selected, as a humming bird balances for a moment at the door of a trumpet flower to be sure that no one is watching ere he goes in, then drive his beak with rapid plunges into the bank, sending down a continuous shower of clay to the river below. When tired he rested on a watch-stub, while his mate made a battering-ram of herself and kept up the work. In a remarkably short time they had a foothold and proceeded to dig themselves in out of sight.

Kingfisher's tunnel is so narrow that he cannot turn around in it. His straight, strong bill loosens the earth; his tiny feet throw it out behind. I would see a shower of dirt, and perchance the tail of Koskomenos for a brief instant, then a period of

waiting, and another shower. This kept up till the tunnel was bored perhaps two feet, when they undoubtedly made a sharp turn, as is their custom. After that they brought most of the earth out in their beaks. While one worked, the other watched or fished at the minnow pool, so that there was steady progress as long as I observed them.

For years I had regarded Koskomenos, as the birds and the rest of the world regard him, as a noisy, half-diabolical creature, between bird and lizard, whom one must pass by with suspicion. But that affair with the mink changed my feelings a bit. Koskomenos' mate might lay her eggs like a reptile, but she could defend them like any bird hero. So I took to watching more carefully; which is the only way to get acquainted.

The first thing I noticed about the birds — an observation confirmed later on many waters — was that each pair of kingfishers have their own particular pools, over which they exercise unquestioned lordship. There may be a dozen pairs of birds on a single stream; but, so far as I have been able to observe, each family has a certain stretch of water on which no other kingfishers are allowed to fish. They may pass up and down freely, but they never stop at the minnow pools; or, if they are caught watching

near them, they are promptly driven out by the rightful owners.

The same thing is true on the lake shores. Whether there is some secret understanding and partition among them, or whether (which is more likely) their right consists in discovery or first arrival, there is no means of knowing.

A curious thing, in this connection, is that while a kingfisher will allow none of his kind to poach on his preserves, he lives at peace with the brood of sheldrakes that occupy the same stretch of river. And the sheldrake eats a dozen fish to his one. The same thing is noticeable among the sheldrakes also, namely, that each pair, or rather each mother and her brood, have their own piece of lake or river on which no others are allowed to fish. The male sheldrakes meanwhile are far away, fishing on their own waters.

I had not half settled this matter of the division of trout streams when another observation came, which was utterly unexpected. Koskomenos, half reptile though he seem, not only recognizes riparian rights, but he is also capable of friendship — and that, too, for a moody prowler of the wilderness whom no one else cares anything about. Here is the proof.

I was out in my canoe alone looking for a loon's nest, one midsummer day, when the fresh trail of a

bull caribou drew me to shore. The trail led straight from the water to a broad alder belt, beyond which, on the hillside, I might find the big brute loafing his time away till evening should come, and watch him to see what he would do with himself.

As I turned shoreward a kingfisher sounded his rattle and came darting across the mouth of the bay where Hukweem the loon had hidden her two eggs. I watched him, admiring the rippling sweep of his flight, like the run of a cat's-paw breeze across a sleeping lake, and the clear blue of his crest against the deeper blue of summer sky. Under him his reflection rippled along, like the rush of a gorgeous fish through the glassy water. Opposite my canoe he checked himself, poised an instant in mid-air, watching the minnows that my paddle had disturbed, and dropped bill first — *plash!* with a silvery tinkle in the sound, as if hidden bells down among the green water weeds had been set to ringing by this sprite of the air. A shower of spray caught the rainbow for a brief instant; the ripples gathered and began to dance over the spot where Koskomenos had gone down, when they were scattered rudely again as he burst out among them with his fish. He swept back to the stub whence he had come, chuckling on the way. There he whacked his fish soundly on the

wood, threw his head back, and through the glass I saw the tail of a minnow wriggling slowly down the road that has for him no turning. Then I took up the caribou trail.

I had gone nearly through the alders, following the course of a little brook and stealing along without a sound, when behind me I heard the kingfisher coming above the alders, rattling as if possessed, *klrrr*, *klrrr*, *klrrr-ik-ik-ik!* On the instant there was a heavy plunge and splash just ahead, and the swift rush of some large animal up the hillside. Over me poised the kingfisher, looking down first at me, then ahead at the unknown beast, till the crashing ceased in a faint rustle far away, when he swept back to his fishing-stub, clacking and chuckling immoderately.

I pushed cautiously ahead and came presently to a beautiful pool below a rock, where the hillside shelved gently towards the alders. From the numerous tracks and the look of the place, I knew instantly that I had stumbled upon a bear's bathing pool. The water was still troubled and muddy; huge tracks, all soppy and broken, led up the hillside in big jumps; the moss was torn, the underbrush spattered with shining water drops. "No room for doubt here," I thought; "Mooween was asleep in this pool, and the kingfisher woke him up — but why? and did he do it on purpose?"

I remembered suddenly a record in an old notebook, which reads: "Sugarloaf Lake, 26 July.—Tried to stalk a bear this noon. No luck. He was nosing alongshore and I had a perfect chance; but a kingfisher scared him." I began to wonder how the rattle of a kingfisher, which is one of the commonest sounds on wilderness waters, could scare a bear, who knows all the sounds of the wilderness perfectly. Perhaps Koskomenos has an alarm note and uses it for a friend in time of need, as gulls go out of their way to alarm a flock of sleeping ducks when danger is approaching.

Here was a new trait, a touch of the human in this unknown, clattering suspect of the fishing streams. I resolved to watch him with keener interest.

Somewhere above me, deep in the tangle of the summer wilderness, Mooween stood watching his back track, eyes, ears, and nose alert to discover what the creature was who dared frighten him out of his noonday bath. It would be senseless to attempt to surprise him now; besides, I had no weapon of any kind.—"To-morrow, about this time, I shall be coming back; then look out, Mooween," I thought as I marked the place and stole away to my canoe.

But the next day when I came to the place, creeping along the upper edge of the alders so as to make

no noise, the pool was clear and quiet, as if nothing but the little trout that hid under the foam bubbles had ever disturbed its peace. Koskomenos was clattering about the bay below as usual. Spite of my precaution he had seen me enter the alders; but he gave me no attention whatever. He went on with his fishing as if he knew perfectly that the bear had deserted his bathing pool.

It was nearly a month before I again camped on the beautiful lake. Summer was gone. All her warmth and more than her fragrant beauty still lingered on forest and river; but the drowsiness had gone from the atmosphere, and the haze had crept into it. Here and there birches and maples flung out their gorgeous banners of autumn over the silent water. A tingle came into the evening air; the lake's breath lay heavy and white in the twilight stillness; birds and beasts became suddenly changed as they entered the brief period of sport and of full feeding.

I was drifting about a reedy bay (the same bay in which the almost forgotten kingfisher had cheated me out of my bear, after eating a minnow that my paddle had routed out for him) shooting frogs for my table with a pocket rifle. How different it was here, I reflected, from the woods about home. There the game was already harried; the report of a gun set

every living creature skulking. Here the crack of my little rifle was no more heeded than the plunge of a fish-hawk, or the groaning of a burdened elm bough. A score of fat woodcock lay unheeding in that bit of alder tangle yonder, the ground bored like a colander after their night's feeding. Up on the burned hillside the partridges said, *quit, quit!* when I appeared, and jumped to a tree and craned their necks to see what I was. The black ducks skulked in the reeds. They were full-grown now and strong of wing, but the early hiding habit was not yet broken up by shooting. They would glide through the sedges, and double the bogs, and crouch in a tangle till the canoe was almost upon them, when with a rush and a frightened *hark-ark!* they shot into the air and away to the river. The mink, changing from brown to black, gave up his nest-robbing for honest hunting, undismayed by trap or deadfall; and up in the inlet I could see grassy domes rising above the bronze and gold of the marsh, where Musquash was building thick and high for winter cold and spring floods. Truly it was good to be here, and to enter for a brief hour into the shy, wild but unharried life of the wood folk.

A big bullfrog showed his head among the lily pads, and the little rifle, unmindful of the joys of an

unharried existence, rose slowly to its place. My eye was glancing along the sights when a sudden movement in the alders on the shore, above and beyond the unconscious head of Chigwooltz the frog, spared him for a little season to his lily pads and his minnow hunting. At the same moment a kingfisher went rattling by to his old perch over the minnow pool. The alders swayed again as if struck; a huge bear lumbered out of them to the shore, with a disgruntled *woof!* at some twig that had switched his ear too sharply.

I slid lower in the canoe till only my head and shoulders were visible. Mooween went nosing alongshore till something — a dead fish or a mussel bed — touched his appetite, when he stopped and began feeding, scarcely two hundred yards away. I reached first for my heavy rifle, then for the paddle, and cautiously "fanned" the canoe towards shore till an old stump on the point covered my approach. Then the little bark jumped forward as if alive. But I had scarcely started when — *klrrrr! klrrr! ik-ik-ik!* Over my head swept Koskomenos with a rush of wings and an alarm cry that spoke only of haste and danger. I had a glimpse of the bear as he shot into the alders, as if thrown by a catapult; the kingfisher wheeled in a great rattling circle about the canoe before he

pitched upon the old stump, jerking his tail and clattering in great excitement.

I swung noiselessly out into the lake, where I could watch the alders. They were all still for a space of ten minutes; but Mooween was there, I knew, sniffing and listening. Then a great snake seemed to be wriggling through the bushes, making no sound, but showing a wavy line of quivering tops as he went.

Down the shore a little way was a higher point, with a fallen tree that commanded a view of half the lake. I had stood there a few days before, while watching to determine the air paths and lines of flight that sheldrakes use in passing up and down the lake,—for birds have runways, or rather flyways, just as foxes do. Mooween evidently knew the spot; the alders showed that he was heading straight for it, to look out on the lake and see what the alarm was about. As yet he had no idea what peril had threatened him; though, like all wild creatures, he had obeyed the first clang of a danger note on the instant. Not a creature in the woods, from Mooween down to Tookhees the wood mouse, but has learned from experience that, in matters of this kind, it is well to jump to cover first and investigate afterwards.

I paddled swiftly to the point, landed and crept to a rock from which I could just see the fallen tree. Mooween was coming. "My bear this time," I thought, as a twig snapped faintly. Then Koskomenos swept into the woods, hovering over the brush near the butt of the old tree, looking down and rattling — *klrrr-ik, clear out! klrrr-ik, clear out!* There was a heavy rush, such as a bear always makes when alarmed; Koskomenos swept back to his perch; and I sought the shore, half inclined to make my next hunting more even-chanced by disposing of one meddlesome factor. "You wretched, noisy, clattering meddler!" I muttered, the front sight of my rifle resting fair on the blue back of Koskomenos, "that is the third time you have spoiled my shot, and you won't have another chance. — But wait; who is the meddler here?"

Slowly the bent finger relaxed on the trigger. A loon went floating by the point, all unconscious of danger, with a rippling wake that sent silver reflections glinting across the lake's deep blue. Far overhead soared an eagle, breeze-borne in wide circles, looking down on his own wide domain, unheeding the man's intrusion. Nearer, a red squirrel barked down his resentment from a giant spruce trunk. Down on my left a heavy splash and a wild, free tumult of quacking told where the black ducks were

coming in, as they had done, undisturbed, for generations. Behind me a long roll echoed through the woods — some young cock partridge, whom the warm sun had beguiled into drumming his spring love-call. From the mountain side a cow moose rolled back a startling answer. Close at hand, yet seeming miles away, a chipmunk was *chunking* sleepily in the sunshine, while a nest of young wood mice were calling their mother in the grass at my feet. And every wild sound did but deepen the vast, wondrous silence of the wilderness.

"After all, what place has the roar of a rifle or the smell of sulphurous powder in the midst of all this blessed peace?" I asked half sadly. As if in answer, the kingfisher dropped with his musical plash, and swept back with exultant rattle to his watchtower. — "Go on with your clatter and your fishing. 'The wilderness and the solitary place shall still be glad' for you and Mooween, and the trout pools would be lonely without you. But I wish you knew that your life lay a moment ago in the bend of my finger, and that some one, besides the bear, appreciates your brave warning."

Then I went back to the point to measure the tracks, and to estimate how big the bear was, and to console myself with the thought of how I would

certainly have had him, if something had not interfered — which is the philosophy of all hunters since Esau.

It was a few days later that the chance came of repaying Koskomenos with coals of fire. The lake surface was still warm; no storms nor frosts had cooled it. The big trout had risen from the deep places, but were not yet quickened enough to take my flies; so, trout hungry, I had gone trolling for them with a minnow. I had taken two good fish, and was moving slowly by the mouth of the bay, Simmo at the paddle, when a suspicious movement on the shore attracted my attention. I passed the line to Simmo, the better to use my glasses, and was scanning the alders sharply, when a cry of wonder came from the Indian. "O bah cosh, see! das second time I catch-um, Koskomenos." And there, twenty feet above the lake, a young kingfisher — one of Koskomenos' frowzy-headed, wild-eyed youngsters — was whirling wildly at the end of my line. He had seen the minnow trailing a hundred feet astern and, with more hunger than discretion, had swooped for it promptly. Simmo, feeling the tug but seeing nothing behind him, had struck promptly, and the hook went home.

I seized the line and began to pull in gently. The young kingfisher came most unwillingly, with a

continuous clatter of protest that speedily brought Koskomenos and his mate, and two or three of the captive's brethren, in a wild, clamoring ring about the canoe. They showed no lack of courage, but swooped again and again at the line, and even at the man who held it. In a moment I had the youngster in my hand, and had disengaged the hook. He was not hurt at all, but terribly frightened; so I held him a little while, enjoying the excitement of the others, whom the captive's alarm rattle kept circling wildly about the canoe. It was noteworthy that not another bird heeded the cry or came near. Even in distress they refused to recognize the outcast. Then, as Koskomenos hovered on quivering wings just over my head, I tossed the captive close up beside him. "There, Koskomenos, take your young chuckle-head, and teach him better wisdom. Next time you see me stalking a bear, please go on with your fishing."

But there was no note of gratitude in the noisy babel that swept up the bay after the kingfishers. When I saw them again, they were sitting on a dead branch, five of them in a row, chuckling and clattering all at once, unmindful of the minnows that played beneath them. I have no doubt that, in their own way, they were telling each other all about it.

MEEKO THE MISCHIEF-MAKER

THERE is a curious Indian legend about Meeko the red squirrel — the Mischief-Maker, as the Milicetes call him — which is also an excellent commentary upon his character. Simmo told it to me, one day, when we had caught Meeko coming out of a woodpecker's hole with the last of a brood of fledgelings in his mouth, chuckling to himself over his hunting.

Long ago, in the days when Clote Scarpe ruled the animals, Meeko was much larger than he is now, large as Mooween the bear. But his temper was so fierce, and his disposition so altogether bad that all the wood folk were threatened with destruction. Meeko killed right and left with the temper of a weasel, who kills from pure lust of blood. So Clote Scarpe, to save the little woods-people, made Meeko smaller — small as he is now. Unfortunately, Clote

Scarpe forgot Meeko's disposition; that remained as big and as bad as before. So now Meeko goes about the woods with a small body and a big temper, barking, scolding, quarreling and, since he cannot destroy in his rage as before, setting other animals by the ears to destroy each other.

When you have listened to Meeko's scolding for a season, and have seen him going from nest to nest after innocent fledgelings; or creeping into the den of his big cousin, the beautiful gray squirrel, to kill the young; or driving away his little cousin, the chipmunk, to steal his hoarded nuts; or watching every fight that goes on in the woods, jeering and chuckling above it, — then you begin to understand the Indian legend.

Spite of his evil ways, however, he is interesting and always unexpected. When you have watched the red squirrel that lives near your camp all summer, and think you know all about him, he does the queerest thing, good or bad, to upset all your theories and even the Indian legends about him.

I remember one that greeted me, the first living thing in the great woods, as I ran my canoe ashore on a wilderness river. Meeko heard me coming. His bark sounded loudly, in a big spruce, above the dip of the paddles. As we turned shoreward, he ran

down the tree in which he was, and out on a fallen log to meet us. I grasped a branch of the old log to steady the canoe and watched him curiously. He had never seen a man before; he barked, jeered, scolded, jerked his tail, whistled, did everything within his power to make me show my teeth and my disposition.

Suddenly he grew excited — and when Meeko grows excited the woods are not big enough to hold him. He came nearer and nearer to my canoe till he leaped upon the gunwale and sat there chattering, as if he were Adjidaumo come back again and I were Hiawatha. All the while he had poured out a torrent of squirrel talk, but now his note changed; jeering and scolding and curiosity went out of it; something else crept in. I began to feel, somehow, that he was trying to make me understand something, and found me very stupid about it.

I began to talk quietly, calling him a rattle-head and a disturber of the peace. At the first sound of my voice he listened with intense curiosity, then leaped to the log, ran the length of it, jumped down and began to dig furiously among the moss and dead leaves. Every moment or two he would stop, and jump to the log to see if I were watching him.

Presently he ran to my canoe, sprang upon the gunwale, jumped back again, and ran along the log

as before to where he had been digging. He did it again, looking back at me and saying plainly: "Come here; come and look." I stepped out of the canoe to the old log, whereupon Meeko went off into a fit of terrible excitement. — I was bigger than he expected; I had only two legs; *kut-e-k'chuck, kut-e-k'chuck! whit, whit, whit, kut-e-k'chuck!*

I stood where I was until he got over his excitement. Then he came towards me, and led me along the log, with much chuckling and jabbering, to the hole in the leaves where he had been digging. When I bent over it he sprang to a spruce trunk, on a level with my head, fairly bursting with excitement, but watching me with intensest interest. In the hole I found a small lizard, one of the rare kind that lives under logs and loves the dusk. He had been bitten through the back and disabled. He could still use legs, tail and head feebly, but could not run away. When I picked him up and held him in my hand, Meeko came closer with loud-voiced curiosity, longing to leap to my hand and claim his own, but held back by fear. — "What is it? He's mine; I found him. What is it?" he barked, jumping about as if bewitched. Two curiosities, the lizard and the man, were almost too much for him. I never saw a squirrel more excited. He had evidently found the lizard by

accident, bit him to keep him still, and then, astonished by the rare find, hid him away where he could dig him out and watch him at leisure.

I put the lizard back into the hole and covered him with leaves; then went to unloading my canoe. Meeko watched me closely. And the moment I was gone he dug away the leaves, took his treasure out, watched it with wide bright eyes, bit it once more to keep it still, and covered it up again carefully. Then he came chuckling along to where I was putting up my tent.

In a week he owned the camp, coming and going at his own will, stealing my provisions when I forgot to feed him, and scolding me roundly at every irregular occurrence. He was an early riser and insisted on my conforming to the custom. Every morning he would leap at daylight from a fir tip to my ridge-pole, run it along to the front and sit there, barking and whistling, until I put my head out of my door, or until Simmo came along with his axe. Of Simmo and his axe Meeko had a mortal dread, which I could not understand till one day when I paddled silently back to camp and, instead of coming up the path, sat idly in my canoe watching the Indian, who had broken his one pipe and now sat making another out of a chunk of black alder and a length of nanny bush.

Simmo was as interesting to watch, in his way, as any of the wood folk.

Presently Meeko came down, chattering his curiosity at seeing the Indian so still and so occupied. A red squirrel is always unhappy unless he knows all about everything. He watched from the nearest tree for a while, but could not make up his mind what was doing. Then he came down on the ground and advanced a foot at a time, jumping up continually but coming down in the same spot, barking to make Simmo turn his head and show his hand. Simmo watched out of the corner of his eye until Meeko was near a solitary tree which stood in the middle of the camp ground, when he jumped up suddenly and rushed at the squirrel, who sprang to the tree and ran to a branch out of reach, snickering and jeering.

Simmo took his axe deliberately and swung it mightily at the foot of the tree, as if to chop it down; only he hit the trunk with the head, not the blade of his weapon. At the first blow, which made his toes tingle, Meeko stopped jeering and ran higher. Simmo swung again and Meeko went up another notch. So it went on, Simmo looking up intently to see the effect and Meeko running higher after each blow, until the tiptop was reached. Then Simmo gave a

mighty whack; the squirrel leaped far out and came to the ground, sixty feet below; picked himself up, none the worse for his leap, and rushed scolding away to his nest. Then Simmo said *umpfh!* like a bear, and went back to his pipe-making. He had not smiled nor relaxed the intent expression of his face during the whole little comedy.

I found out afterwards that making Meeko jump from a tree top is one of the few diversions of Indian children. I tried it myself many times with many squirrels, and found to my astonishment that a jump from any height, however great, is no concern to a squirrel, red or gray. They have a way of flattening the body and bushy tail against the air, which breaks their fall. Their bodies, and especially their bushy tails, have a curious tremulous motion, like the quiver of wings, as they come down. The flying squirrel's sailing down from a tree top to another tree, fifty feet away, is but an exaggeration, due to the membrane connecting the fore and hind legs, of what all squirrels practice continually. I have seen a red squirrel land lightly after jumping from an enormous height, and run away as if nothing unusual had happened. But though I have watched them often, I have never seen a squirrel do this except when compelled to do so. When chased by a weasel or a marten, or when the

axe beats against the trunk below — either because the vibration hurts their feet, or else they fear the tree is being cut down — they use the strange gift to save their lives. But I fancy it is a breathless experience, and they never try it for fun, though I have seen them do all sorts of risky stumps in leaping from branch to branch.

It is a curious fact that, though a squirrel leaps from a great height without hesitation, it is practically impossible to make him take a jump of a few feet to the ground. Probably the upward rush of air, caused by falling a long distance, is necessary to flatten the body enough to make him land lightly.

It would be interesting to know whether the raccoon also, a large, heavy animal, has the same way of breaking his fall when he jumps from a height. One bright moonlight night, when I ran ahead of the dogs, I saw a big coon leap from a tree to the ground, a distance of some thirty or forty feet. The dogs had treed him in an evergreen, and he left them howling below while he stole silently from branch to branch until a good distance away, when to save time he leaped to the ground. He struck with a heavy thump, but ran on uninjured as swiftly as before, and gave the dogs a long run before they treed him again.

The sole of a coon's foot is padded thick with fat and gristle, so that it must feel like landing on springs when he jumps; but I suspect that he also knows the squirrel trick of flattening his body and tail against the air so as to fall lightly.

The chipmunk seems to be the only one of the squirrel family in whom this gift is wanting. Possibly he has it also, if the need ever comes. I fancy, however, that he would fare badly if compelled to jump from a spruce top, for his body is heavy and his tail small from long living on the ground; all of which seems to indicate that the tree-squirrel's bushy tail is given him, not for ornament, but to aid his passage from branch to branch, and to break his fall when he comes down from a height.

By way of contrast with Meeko, you may try a curious trick on the chipmunk. It is not easy to get him into a tree; he prefers a log or an old wall when frightened; and he is seldom more than two or three jumps from his den. But watch him as he goes from his garner to the grove where the acorns are, or to the field where his winter corn is ripening. Put yourself near his path (he always follows the same one to and fro) where there is no refuge close at hand. Then, as he comes along, rush at him suddenly and he will take to the nearest tree in his

alarm. When he recovers from his fright — which is soon over; for he is the most trustful of squirrels and looks down at you with interest, never questioning your motives — take a stick and begin to tap the tree softly. The more slow and rhythmical your tattoo the sooner he is charmed. Presently he comes down closer and closer, his eyes filled with strange wonder. More than once I have had a chipmunk come to my hand and rest upon it, looking everywhere for the queer sound that brought him down, forgetting fright and cornfield and coming winter in his bright curiosity.

Meeko is a bird of another color. He never trusts you nor anybody else fully, and his curiosity is generally of the vulgar, selfish kind. When the autumn woods are busy places, and wings flutter and little feet go pattering everywhere after winter supplies, he also begins garnering, remembering the hungry days of last winter. But he is always more curious to see what others are doing than to fill his own bins. He seldom trusts to one storehouse — he is too suspicious for that — but hides his things in twenty different

places; some shagbarks in the old wall, a handful of acorns in a hollow tree, an ear of corn under the eaves of the old barn, a pint of chestnuts scattered about in the trees, some in crevices in the bark, some in a pine crotch covered carefully with needles, and one or two stuck firmly into the splinters of every broken branch that is not too conspicuous. But he never gathers much at a time. The moment he sees anybody else gathering he forgets his own work and goes spying to see where others are hiding their store. The little chipmunk, who knows his thieving and his devices, always makes one turn, at least, in the tunnel to his den too small for Meeko to follow.

He sees a blue jay flitting through the woods, and knows by his unusual silence that he is hiding things. Meeko follows after him, stopping all his jabber and stealing from tree to tree, watching patiently, for hours if need be, until he knows that Deedeeaskh is gathering corn from a certain field. Then he watches the line of flight, like a bee hunter, and sees Deedeeaskh disappear twice by an oak on the wood's edge, a hundred yards away. Meeko rushes away at a headlong pace and hides himself in the oak. There he traces the jay's line of flight a little farther into the woods; sees the unconscious thief disappear by

an old pine. Meeko hides in the pine, and so traces the jay straight to one of his storehouses.

Sometimes Meeko is so elated over the discovery that, with all the fields laden with food, he cannot wait for winter. When the jay goes away Meeko falls to eating or to carrying away his store. More often he marks the spot and goes away silently. When he is hungry he will carry off Deedeeaskh's corn before touching his own.

Once I saw the tables turned in a most interesting fashion. Deedeeaskh is as big a thief in his way as is Meeko, and also as vile a nest-robber. The red squirrel had found a hoard of chestnuts — small fruit, but sweet and good — and was hiding it away. Part of it he stored in a hollow under the stub of a broken branch, twenty feet from the ground, so near the source of supply that no one would ever think of looking for it there. I was hidden away in a thicket when I discovered him at his work quite by accident. He seldom came twice to the same spot, but went off to his other storehouses in succession. After an unusually long absence, when I was expecting him every moment, a blue jay came stealing into the tree, spying and sneaking about, as if a nest of fresh thrush's eggs were somewhere near. He smelled a mouse evidently, for after a moment's spying he hid

himself away in the tree top, close up against the trunk. Presently Meeko came back, with his face bulging as if he had toothache, uncovered his store, emptied in the half dozen chestnuts from his cheek pockets and covered them all up again.

The moment he was gone the blue jay went straight to the spot, seized a mouthful of nuts and flew swiftly away. He made three trips before the squirrel came back. Meeko in his hurry never noticed the loss, but emptied his pockets and was off to the chestnut tree again. When he returned, the jay in his eagerness had disturbed the leaves which covered the hidden store. Meeko noticed it and was all suspicion in an instant. He whipped off the covering and stood staring down intently into the garner, evidently trying to compute the number he had brought and the number that were there. Then a terrible scolding began, a scolding that was broken short off when a distant screaming of jays came floating through the woods. Meeko covered his store hurriedly, ran along a limb and leaped to the next tree, where he hid in a knot hole, just his eyes visible, watching his garner keenly out of the darkness.

Meeko has no patience. Three or four times he showed himself nervously. Fortunately for me, the

jay had found some excitement to keep his rattle-brain busy for a moment. A flash of blue, and he came stealing back, just as Meeko had settled himself for more watching. After much peeking and listening the jay flew down to the storehouse, and Meeko, unable to contain himself a moment longer at sight of the thief, jumped out of his hiding and came rushing along the limb, hurling threats and vituperation ahead of him. The jay fluttered off, screaming derision. Meeko followed, hurling more abuse, but soon gave up the chase and came back to his chestnuts. It was curious to watch him there, sitting motionless and intent, his nose close down to his treasure, trying to compute his loss. Then he stuffed his cheeks full and began carrying his hoard off to another hiding place.

The autumn woods are full of such little comedies. Jays, crows, and squirrels are all hiding away winter's supplies, and no matter how great the abundance, not one of them can resist the temptation to steal or to break into another's garner.

Meeko is a poor provider; he would much rather live on buds and bark and apple seeds and fir cones, and what he can steal from others in the winter, than bother himself with laying up supplies of his own. When the spring comes he goes a-hunting, and is for

Hurling threats and vituperation ahead of him

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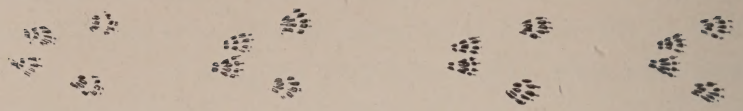
a season the most villainous of nest-robbers. Every bird in the woods then hates him, takes a jab at him, and cries *thief, thief!* wherever he goes.

On a trout brook once I had a curious sense of comradeship with Meeko. It was in the early spring, when all the wild things make holiday, and man goes a-fishing. Near the brook a red squirrel had tapped a maple tree with his teeth and was tasting the sweet sap as it came up scantily. Seeing him and remembering my own boyhood, I cut a little hollow into the bark of a black birch tree and, when it brimmed full, drank the sap with immense satisfaction. Meeko stopped his own drinking to watch, then to scold and denounce me roundly.

While my cup was filling again I went down to the brook and took a wary old trout from his den under the end of a log, where the foam bubbles were dancing merrily. When I went back, thirsting for another sweet draught from the same spring, Meeko had emptied it to the last drop and had his nose down in the bottom of my cup, catching the sap as it welled up with an abundance that must have surprised him. When I went away quietly he followed me through the wood to the pool at the edge of the meadow, to see what I would do next.



Wherever you go in the wilderness you find Meeko ahead of you, and all the best camping grounds pre-empted by him. Even on the islands he seems to own the prettiest spots, and disputes mightily your right to stay there; though he is generally glad enough of your company to share his loneliness, and shows it plainly.

Once I found one living all by himself on an island in the middle of a wilderness lake, with no company whatever except a family of mink, who are his enemies. He had probably crossed on the ice in the late spring, and while he was busy here and there with his explorations the ice broke up, cutting off his retreat to the mainland, which was too far away for his swimming. So he was a prisoner for the long summer, and welcomed me gladly to share his exile. He was the only red squirrel I ever met that never scolded me roundly at least once a day. His loneliness had made him quite tame. Most of the time he lived within sight of my tent door. Not even Simmo's axe, though it made him jump twice from the top of a spruce, could keep him long away. He had twenty

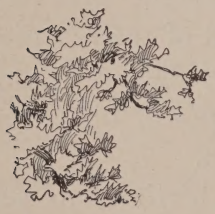
ways of getting up an excitement, and whenever he barked out in the woods I knew that it was simply to call me to see his discovery,—a new nest, a loon that swam up close, a thieving muskrat, a hawk that rested on a dead stub, the mink family eating my fish heads, —and when I stole out to see what it was, he would run ahead, barking and chuckling at having some one to share his interests with him.

In such places squirrels use the ice for occasional journeys to the mainland. Sometimes also, when the waters are calm, they swim over. Hunters have told me that when the breeze is fair they make use of a floating bit of wood, sitting up straight with tail curled over their backs, making a sail of their bodies —just as an Indian, with no knowledge of sailing whatever, puts a spruce bush in a bow of his canoe and lets the wind do his work for him.

That would be the sight of a lifetime, to see Meeko sailing his boat; but I have no doubt whatever that it is true. The only red squirrel that I ever saw in the water fell in by accident. He swam rapidly to a floating board, shook himself, sat up with his tail raised along his back, and began to dry himself. After a little he saw that the slight breeze was setting him farther from shore. He began to chatter excitedly, and changed his position two or three times,

evidently trying to catch the wind right. Finding that it was of no use, he plunged in again and swam easily to land.

That he lives and thrives in the wilderness, spite of enemies and hunger and winter cold, is a tribute to his wits. He never hibernates, except in severe storms, when for a few days he lies close in his den. Hawks and owls and weasels and martens hunt him continually; yet he more than holds his own in the big woods, which would lose some of their charm if their vast silences were not sometimes broken by his petty scoldings.



As with most wild creatures, the squirrels that live in touch with civilization are much keener witted than their wilderness brethren. The most interesting one I ever knew lived in the trees just outside my dormitory window, in a New England college town. He was the patriarch of a large family, and the greatest thief and rascal among them. I speak of the family,

but, so far as I could see, there was very little family life. Each one shifted for himself the moment he was big enough, and stole from all the others indiscriminately.

It was while watching these squirrels that I discovered first that they have regular paths among the trees, as well defined as our own highways. Not only has each squirrel his own private paths and ways, but all the squirrels follow certain courses along the branches in going from one tree to another. Even the strange squirrels, which ventured at times into the grove, followed these highways as if they had been used to them all their lives.

On a recent visit to the old dormitory I watched the squirrels for a while, and found that they used exactly the same paths, — up the trunk of a big oak to a certain boss, along a branch to a certain crook, a jump to a linden twig and so on, making use of one of the highways that I had watched them following ten years before. Yet this course was not the shortest between two points, and there were a hundred other branches that they might have used.

I had the good fortune one morning to see Meeko, the patriarch, make a new path for himself that none of the others ever followed so long as I was in the dormitory. He had a home den over a hallway, and

a hiding place for acorns in a hollow linden. Between the two was a driveway; but though the branches arched over it from either side, the jump was too great for him to take. A hundred times I saw him run out on the farthest oak twig and look across longingly at the maple that swayed on the other side. It was perhaps three feet away, with no branches beneath to seize and break his fall in case he missed his spring, — altogether too much for a red squirrel to attempt. He would rush out as if determined to try it, time after time, but always his courage failed him; he had to go down the oak trunk and cross the driveway on the ground, where numberless straying dogs were always ready to chase him.

One morning I saw him run twice in succession at the jump, only to turn back. But the air was keen and bracing, and he felt its inspiration. He drew farther back, then came rushing along the oak branch and, before he had time to be afraid, hurled himself across the chasm. He landed fairly on the maple twig, with several inches to spare, and hung there with claws and teeth, swaying up and down gloriously. Then, chattering his delight at himself, he ran down the maple, back across the driveway, and tried the jump three times in succession to be sure he could do it.

After that he sprang across frequently. But I noticed that whenever the branches were wet with rain or sleet he never attempted it; and he never tried the return jump, which was uphill, and which he seemed to know by instinct was too much to attempt.

When I began feeding him, in the cold winter days, he showed me many curious bits of his life. First I put some nuts near the top of an old well, among the stones of which he used to hide things in the autumn. Long after he had eaten all his store he used to come and search the crannies among the stones to see if perchance he had overlooked any trifles. When he found a handful of shagbarks, one morning, in a hole only a foot below the surface, his astonishment knew no bounds. His first thought was that he had forgotten them all these hungry days, and he promptly ate the biggest of the store within sight, a thing I never saw a squirrel do before. His second thought — I could see it in his changed attitude, his sudden creepings and hidings — was that some other squirrel had hidden them there since his last visit. Whereupon he carried them all off and hid them in a broken linden branch.

Then I tossed him peanuts, throwing them first far away, then nearer and nearer till he would come to my window-sill. And when I woke one morning he

was sitting there looking in at the window, waiting for me to get up and bring his breakfast.

In a week he had showed me all his hiding places. The most interesting of these was over a roofed piazza in a building near by. He had gnawed a hole under the eaves, where it would not be noticed, and lived there in solitary grandeur during stormy days in a den four by eight feet, and rain-proof. In one corner was a bushel of corncobs, some of them two or three years old, which he had stolen from a corn-field near by in the early autumn mornings. With characteristic improvidence he had fallen to eating the corn while yet there was plenty more to be gathered. In consequence he was hungry before February was half over, and living by his wits, like his brother of the wilderness.

The other squirrels soon noticed his journeys to my window, and presently they too came for their share. Spite of his fury in driving them away, they managed in twenty ways to circumvent him. It was most interesting, while he sat on my window-sill eating peanuts, to see the nose and eyes of another squirrel peering over the crotch of the nearest tree, watching the proceedings from his hiding place. Then I would give Meeko five or six peanuts at once. Instantly the old hiding instinct would come

back; he would start away, taking as much of his store as he could carry with him. The moment he was gone, out would come a squirrel — sometimes two or three from their concealment — and carry off all the peanuts that remained.

Meeko's wrath when he returned was most comical. The Indian legend is true as gospel to squirrel nature. If he returned unexpectedly and caught one of the intruders, there was always a furious chase and a deal of scolding and squirrel jabber before peace was restored and the peanuts eaten.

Once, when he had hidden a dozen or more nuts in the broken linden branch, a very small squirrel came prowling along and discovered the store. In an instant he was all alertness, peeking, listening, exploring, till quite sure that the coast was clear, when he rushed away headlong with a mouthful.

He did not return that day; but the next morning early I saw him do the same thing. An hour later Meeko appeared and, finding nothing on the window-sill, went to the linden. Half his store of yesterday was gone. Curiously enough, he did not suspect at first that they were stolen. Meeko is always quite sure that nobody knows his secrets. He searched the tree over, went to his other hiding places, came back, counted his peanuts, then searched the ground

beneath, thinking, no doubt, the wind must have blown them out — all this before he had tasted a peanut of those that remained.

Slowly it dawned upon him that he had been robbed and there was an outburst of wrath. But instead of carrying what were left to another place, he left them where they were, still without eating, and hid himself near by to watch. I neglected a lecture in philosophy to see the proceedings, but nothing happened. Meeko's patience soon gave out, or else he grew hungry, for he ate two or three of his scanty supply of peanuts, scolding and threatening to himself. But he left the rest carefully where they were.

Two or three times that day I saw him sneaking about, keeping a sharp eye on the linden; but the little thief was watching too, and kept out of the way.

Early next morning a great hubbub rose outside my window, and I jumped up to see what was going on. Little Thief had come back, and Big Thief caught him in the act of robbery. Away they went pell-mell, jabbering like a flock of blackbirds, along a linden branch, through two maples, across a driveway, and up a big elm where Little Thief whisked out of sight into a knot hole.

After him came Big Thief, swearing vengeance. But the knot hole was too small; he could n't get in. Twist and turn and push and threaten as he would, he could not get in; and Little Thief sat just inside jeering maliciously.

Meeko gave it up after a while and went off, nursing his wrath. But ten feet from the tree a thought struck him. He rushed away out of sight, making a great noise, then came back quietly and hid under an eave where he could watch the knot hole.

Presently Little Thief came out, rubbed his eyes, and looked all about. Through my glass I could see Meeko blinking and twitching under the dark eave, trying to control his anger. Little Thief ventured to a branch a few feet away from his refuge, and Big Thief, unable to hold himself a moment longer, rushed out, firing a volley of direful threats ahead of him. In a flash Little Thief was back in his knot hole and the comedy began all over again.

I never saw how it ended; but for a day or two there was an unusual amount of chasing and scolding going on outside my windows.

It was this same big squirrel that first showed me a curious trick of hiding. Whenever he found a handful of nuts on my window-sill and suspected that other squirrels were watching to share the bounty, he

had a way of hiding them all very rapidly. He would never carry them direct to his various garners; first, because these were too far away, and the other squirrels would steal while he was gone; second, because, with hungry eyes watching somewhere, they might follow and find out where he habitually kept things. So he used to hide them all on the ground, under the leaves in autumn, under snow in winter, and all within sight of the window-sill, where he could watch the store as he hurried to and fro. Then, at his leisure, he would dig them up and carry them off to his den, two cheekfuls at a time.

Each nut was hidden by itself; never so much as two in one spot. For a long time it puzzled me to know how he remembered so many places. I noticed first that he would always start from a certain point, a tree or a stone, with his burden. When it was hidden he would come back by the shortest route to the window-sill; but with his new mouthful he would always go first to the tree or stone he had selected, and from there search out a new hiding place.

It was many days before I noticed that, starting from one fixed point, he generally worked toward another tree or stone in the distance. Then his secret was out; he hid things in a line. Next day he would come back, start from his fixed point and move slowly

towards the distant one till his nose told him he was over a peanut, which he dug up and ate or carried away to his den. But he always seemed to distrust himself; for on hungry days he would go over two or three of his old lines in the hope of finding a mouthful that he had overlooked.

This method was used only when he had a large supply to dispose of hurriedly, and not always then. Meeko is a careless fellow and soon forgets. When I gave him only a few to dispose of, he hid them helter-skelter among the leaves, forgetting some of them afterwards and enjoying the rare delight of stumbling upon them when he was hungriest — much like a child whom I saw once giving himself a sensation. He would throw his penny on the ground, go round the house, and saunter back with his hands in his pockets till he saw the penny, which he pounced upon with almost the joy of treasure-trove in the highway.

Meeko made a sad end — a fate which he deserved well enough, but which I had to pity, spite of myself. When the spring came on, he went back to evil ways. Sap was sweet and buds were luscious with the first swelling of tender leaves; spring rains had washed out plenty of acorns in the crannies under the big oak, and there were fresh-roasted peanuts still at the corner window-sill within easy jump of a linden twig;

but he took to watching the robins to see where they nested, and when the young were hatched he came no more to my window. Twice I saw him with fledgelings in his mouth; and I drove him day after day from a late clutch of robin's eggs that I could watch from my study.

He had warnings enough. Once some students, who had been friendly all winter, stoned him out of a tree where he was nest-robbing; once the sparrows caught him in their nest under the high eaves, and knocked him off promptly. A twig upon which he caught in falling saved his life undoubtedly, for the sparrows were after him and he barely escaped into a knot hole, leaving the angry horde clamoring outside. But nothing could reform him.

One morning at daylight a great crying of robins brought me to the window. Meeko was running along a limb, the first of the fledgelings in his mouth. After him were five or six robins whom the parents' danger cry had brought to the rescue. They were all excited and tremendously in earnest. They cried *thief! thief!* and swooped at him like hawks. Their cries speedily brought a score of other birds, some to watch, others to join in the punishment.

Meeko dropped the young bird and ran for his den; but a robin dashed recklessly in his face and

knocked him fair from the tree. That and the fall of the fledgeling excited the birds more than ever. This thieving bird-eater was not invulnerable. A dozen rushed at him on the ground and left the marks of their beaks on his coat before he could reach the nearest tree.

Again he rushed for his den, but wherever he turned now angry wings fluttered over him and beaks jabbed in his face. Raging but frightened, he sat up to snarl wickedly. Like a flash a robin hurled himself down, caught the squirrel just under his ear and knocked him again to the ground.

Things began to look dark for Meeko. The birds grew bolder and angrier every minute. When he started to climb a tree he was hurled off twice ere he reached a crotch and drew himself down into it. He was safe there with his back against a big limb; they could not get at him from behind. But the angry clamor in front frightened him, and again he started for his place of refuge. His footing was unsteady now and his head dizzy from the blows he had received. Before he had gone half a limb's length he was again on the ground, with a dozen birds pecking at him as they swooped over.

With his last strength he snapped viciously at his foes and rushed to the linden. My window was

open, and he came creeping, hurrying towards it on the branch over which he had often capered so lightly in the winter days. Over him clamored the birds, forgetting all fear of me in their hatred of the nest-robber.

A dozen times he was struck on the way, but at every blow he clung to the branch with claws and teeth, then staggered on doggedly, making no defense. His whole thought now was to reach the window-sill.

At the place where he always jumped he stopped and began to sway, gripping the bark with his claws, trying to summon strength for the effort. He knew it was too much, but it was his last hope. At the instant of his spring a robin swooped in his face; another caught him a side blow in mid-air, and he fell heavily to the stones below. — *Sic semper tyrannis!* yelled the robins, scattering wildly as I ran down the steps to save him, if it were not too late.

He died in my hands a moment later, with curious maliciousness nipping my finger sharply at the last gasp. He was the only squirrel of the lot who knew how to hide in a line; and never a one since his day has taken the jump from oak to maple over the driveway.

THE OL' BEECH PA'TRIDGE

OF ALL the wild birds that still haunt our remaining solitudes, the ruffed grouse — the pa'tridge of our younger days — is perhaps the wildest, the most alert, the most suggestive of the primeval wilderness that we have lost. You enter the woods from the hillside pasture, lounging a moment on the old gray fence to note the play of light and shadow on the birch bolls. Your eye lingers restfully on the wonderful mixture of soft colors that no brush has ever yet imitated, the rich old gold of autumn tapestries, the glimmering gray-green of the mouldering stump that the fungi have painted. What a giant that tree must have been, generations ago, in its days of strength; how puny the birches that now grow out of its roots! You

remember the great canoe birches by the wilderness river, whiter than the little tent that nestled beneath them, their wide bark banners waving in the wind, soft as the flutter of owls' wings that swept among them, shadow-like, in the twilight. A vague regret steals over you that our own wilderness is gone, and with it most of the shy folk that loved its solitudes.

Suddenly there is a rustle in the leaves. Something stirs by the old stump. A moment ago you thought it was only a brown root; now it runs, hides, draws itself erect — *Kwit, kwit, kwit!* and with a whirring rush of wings and a whirling eddy of dead leaves a grouse bursts up, and darts away like a blunt arrow, flint-tipped, gray-feathered, among the startled birch stems. As you follow softly to rout him out again, and to thrill and be startled by his unexpected rush, something of the Indian has come unbidden into your cautious tread. All regret for the wilderness is vanished; you are simply glad that so much wildness still remains to speak eloquently of the good old days.

It is this element of unconquerable wildness in the grouse, coupled with a host of early, half-fearful impressions, that always sets my heart to beating, as to an old tune, whenever a partridge bursts away at my feet. I remember well a little child that used to

steal away into the still woods, which drew him by an irresistible attraction while as yet their dim arches and quiet paths were full of mysteries and haunting terrors. Step by step the child would advance into the shadows, cautious as a wood mouse, timid as a rabbit. Suddenly a swift rustle and a thunderous rush of something from the ground that first set the child's heart to beating wildly, and then reached his heels in a fearful impulse which sent him rushing out of the woods, tumbling headlong over the old gray wall, and scampering halfway across the pasture before he dared halt from the terror behind. And then, at last, another impulse which always sent the child stealing back into the woods again, shy, alert, tense as a watching fox, to find out what the fearful thing was that could make such a commotion in the quiet woods.

And when he found out at last — ah, that was a discovery beside which the panther's kittens are as nothing as I think of them. One day in the woods, near the spot where the awful thunder used to burst away, the child heard a cluck and a *kwit-kwit*, and saw a beautiful bird dodging, gliding, halting, hiding in the underbrush, watching the child's every motion. And when he ran forward to put his cap over the bird, it burst away, and then — *whirr! whirr! whirr!* a

whole covey of grouse roared up all about him. The terror of it weakened his legs so that he fell down in the eddying leaves and covered his ears. But this time he knew what it was at last, and in a moment he was up and running, not away, but fast as his little legs could carry him after the last bird that he saw hurtling away among the trees, with a birch branch that he had touched with his wings nodding good-by behind him.

There is another association with this same bird that always gives an added thrill to the rush of his wings through the startled woods. It was in the old school by the cross-roads, one sleepy September afternoon. A class in spelling, big boys and little girls, toed a crack in front of the master's desk. The rest of the school droned away on appointed tasks in the drowsy interlude. The fat boy slept openly on his arms; even the mischief-maker was quiet, thinking dreamily of summer days that were gone. Suddenly there was a terrific crash, a clattering tinkle of broken glass, a howl from a boy near the window. Twenty knees banged the desks beneath as twenty boys jumped. Then, before any of us had found his wits, Jimmy Jenkins, a red-headed boy whom no calamity could throw off his balance and from whom no opportunity ever got away free, had jumped over two forms

and was down on the floor in the girls' aisle, gripping something between his knees —

"I 've got him," he announced, with the air of a general.

"Got what?" thundered the master.

"Got a pa'tridge; he 's an old buster," said Jimmy. And he straightened up, holding by the legs a fine cock partridge whose stiffening wings still beat his sides spasmodically. He had been scared-up in the neighboring woods, frightened by some hunter out of his native coverts. When he reached the unknown open places he was more frightened still and, as a frightened grouse always flies straight, he had driven like a bolt through the schoolhouse window, killing himself by the impact.

Rule-of-three and cube root and the unmapped wilderness of partial payments have left but scant impression on one of those pupils, at least; but a bird that could wake up a drowsy schoolroom and bring out a living lesson, full of life and interest and the subtile call of the woods, from a drowsy teacher who studied law by night, but never his boys by day, — that was a bird to be respected. I have studied him with keener interest ever since.

Yet however much you study the grouse, you learn little except how wild he is. Occasionally, when you

are still in the woods and a grouse walks up to your hiding place, you get a fair glimpse and an idea or two; but he soon discovers you, and draws himself up straight as a string and watches you for five minutes without stirring or even winking. Then, outdone at his own game, he glides away. A rustle of little feet on leaves, a faint *kwit-kwit* with a question in it, and he is gone. Nor will he come back, like the fox, to watch from the other side and find out what you are.

Civilization, in its first advances, is good to the grouse, providing him with an abundance of food and driving away his enemies. Grouse are always more numerous about settlements than in the wilderness. Unlike other birds, however, he grows wilder and wilder by nearness to men's dwellings. I suppose that is because the presence of man is so often accompanied by the rush of a dog and the report of a gun, and perhaps by the rip and sting of shot in his feathers as he darts away. Once, in the wilderness, when very hungry, I caught two partridges by slipping over their heads a string noose at the end of a pole. Here one might as well try to catch a bat in the twilight as to hope to snare one of our upland partridges by any such invention, or even to get near enough to meditate the attempt.

But there was one grouse — and he the very wildest of all that I have ever met in the woods — who showed me unwittingly many bits of his life, and with whom I grew to be very well acquainted after a few seasons' watching. All the hunters of the village knew him well; and a half-dozen boys, who owned guns and were eager to join the hunters' ranks, had a shooting acquaintance with him. He was known far and wide as "the ol' beech pa'tridge." That he was old no one could deny who knew his ways and his devices; and he was frequently scared-up in a beech wood by a brook, a couple of miles out of the village.

Spite of much learned discussion as to different varieties of grouse, due to marked variations in coloring, I think personally that we have but one variety, and that differences in color are due largely to the different surroundings in which they live. Of all birds the grouse is most invisible when quiet, his coloring blends so perfectly with the roots and leaves and tree stems among which he hides. This wonderful invisibility is increased by the fact that he changes color easily. He is darker in summer, lighter in winter, like the rabbit. When he lives in dark woods he becomes a glossy red-brown; and when his haunt is among the birches he is often a decided gray.

This was certainly true of the old beech partridge. When he spread his tail wide and darted away among the beeches, his color blended so perfectly with the gray tree trunks that only a keen eye could separate him. And he knew every art of the dodger perfectly. When he rose there was scarcely a second of time before he had put a big tree between you and him, so as to cover his line of flight. I don't know how many times he had been shot at on the wing. Every hunter I knew had tried it many times; and every boy who roamed the woods in autumn had sought to pot him on the ground. But he never lost a feather; and he would never stand to a dog long enough for the most cunning of our craft to take his position.

When a brood of young partridges hear a dog running in the woods, they generally flit to the lower branches of a tree and *kwit-kwit* at him curiously. They have not yet learned the difference between him and the fox, who is the ancient enemy of their kind, and whom their ancestors of the wilderness escaped and tantalized in the same way. But when it is an old bird that your setter is trailing, his actions are a curious mixture of cunning and fascination. As old Don draws to a point, the grouse pulls himself up rigidly by a stump and watches the dog. So both stand like statues; the dog held by the strange instinct which

makes him point, lost to sight, sound and all things else save the smell in his nose, the grouse tense as a fiddlestring, every sense alert, watching the enemy whom he thinks to be fooled by his good hiding. For a few moments they are motionless; then the grouse skulks and glides to a better cover. As the strong scent fades from Don's nose, he breaks his point and follows. The grouse hears him and again hides by drawing himself up against a stump, where he is invisible; again Don stiffens into his point, one foot lifted, nose and tail in a straight line, as if he were frozen and could not move.

So it goes on, now gliding through the coverts, now still as a stone, till the grouse discovers that so long as he is still the dog seems paralyzed, unable to move or feel. Then he draws himself up, braced against a root or a tree boll; and there they stand, within twenty feet of each other, never stirring, never winking, till the dog falls from exhaustion at the strain, or breaks it by leaping forward, or till the hunter's step on the leaves fills the grouse with a new terror that sends him rushing away through the October woods to deeper solitudes.

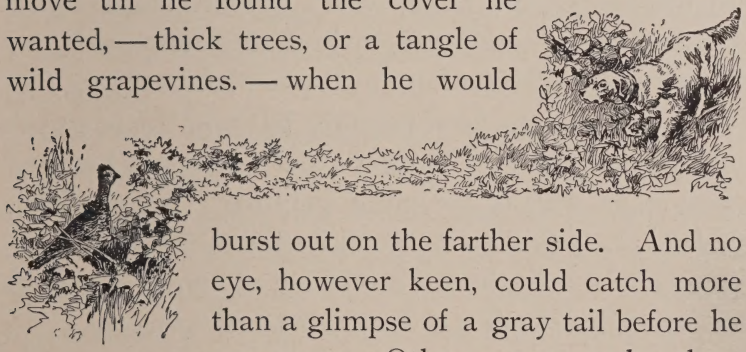
Once, at noon, I saw Old Ben, a famous dog, draw to a perfect point. Just ahead, in a tangle of brown brakes, I could see the head and neck of a grouse

watching the dog keenly. Old Ben's master, to test the splendid training of his dog, proposed lunch on the spot. We withdrew a little space and ate deliberately, watching the bird and the dog with an interest that grew keener and keener as the meal progressed, while Old Ben stood like a rock, and the grouse's eye shone steadily out of the tangle of brakes. Nor did either move so much as an eyelid while we ate, and Ben's master smoked his pipe with quiet confidence. At last, after a full hour, he whacked his pipe on his boot heel and rose to reach for his gun. That meant death for the grouse; but I owed him too much of keen enjoyment to see him cut down in swift flight. In the moment that the master's back was turned I hurled a knot at the tangle of brakes. The grouse burst away, and Old Ben, shaken out of his trance by the whirr of wings, dropped obediently to the charge and turned his head to say reproachfully with his eyes: "What in the world is the matter with you back there — did n't I hold him long enough?"

The noble old fellow was trembling like a leaf after the long strain when I went up to him to pat his head and praise his steadiness, and share with him the better half of my lunch. But to this day Ben's master does not know what started the grouse so suddenly; and as he tells you about the incident will still

say regretfully: "I ought to a-started jest a minute sooner, 'fore he got tired. Then I 'd a had 'im."

The old beech partridge, however, was a bird of a different mind. No dog ever stood him for more than a second; he had learned too well what the thing meant. The moment he heard the patter of a dog's feet on leaves he would run rapidly, and skulk and hide and run again, keeping dog and hunter on the move till he found the cover he wanted, — thick trees, or a tangle of wild grapevines. — when he would



burst out on the farther side. And no eye, however keen, could catch more than a glimpse of a gray tail before he was gone. Other grouse make short straight flights, and can be followed and found again; but he always drove away on strong wings for an incredible distance, and swerved far to right or left; so that it was a waste of time to follow him up. Before you found him he had rested his wings and was ready for another flight; and when you did find him he would shoot away like an arrow out of the top of a pine tree and give you never a glimpse of himself.

He lived most of the time on a ridge behind the 'Fales place,' an abandoned farm on the east of the old post road. This was his middle range, a place of dense coverts, bullbrier thickets and sunny open spots among the ledges, where you might, with good-luck, find him on special days at any season. But he had all the migratory instincts of a Newfoundland caribou. In winter he moved south, with twenty other grouse, to the foot of the ridge, which dropped away into a succession of knolls and ravines and sunny, well-protected little valleys, where food was plenty. Here, fifty years ago, was the farm pasture; but now it had grown up everywhere with thickets and berry patches, and wild apple trees of the birds' planting. All the birds loved it in their season; quail nested on its edges; and you could kick a brown rabbit out of almost any of its decaying brush piles or hollow moss-grown logs.

In the spring he crossed the ridge northward again, moving into the still dark woods, where he had two or three wives with as many broods of young partridges; all of whom, by the way, he regarded with astonishing indifference.

Across the whole range — stealing silently out of the big woods, brawling along the foot of the ridge and singing through the old pasture — ran a brook that the old beech partridge seemed to love. A hundred

times I started him from its banks. You had only to follow it any November morning before eight o'clock, and you would be sure to find him. But why he haunted it at this particular time and season I never found out.

I used to wonder sometimes why I never saw him drink. Other birds had their regular drinking places and bathing pools there, and I frequently watched them from my hiding; but though I saw him many times, after I learned his haunts, he never touched the water.

One early summer morning a possible explanation suggested itself. I was sitting quietly by the brook, on the edge of the big woods, waiting for a pool to grow quiet, out of which I had just taken a trout and in which I suspected there was a larger one hiding. As I waited a mother-grouse and her brood — one of the old beech partridge's numerous families for whom he provided nothing — came gliding along the edge of the woods. They had come to drink, evidently, but not from the brook. A sweeter draught than that was waiting for their coming. The dew was still clinging to the grass blades; here and there a drop hung from a leaf point, flashing like a diamond in the early light. And the little partridges, cheeping, gliding, whistling among the drooping stems, would raise their little

bills for each shining dewdrop that attracted them, and drink it down and run with glad little pipings and gurglings to the next drop that flashed an invitation from its bending grass blade. The old mother walked sedately in the midst of them, now fussing over a laggard, now clucking them all together in an eager, chirping, jumping little crowd, each one struggling to be first in at the death of a fat slug she had discovered on the underside of a leaf; and anon reaching herself for a dewdrop that hung too high for their drinking. So they passed by within a few yards, a shy, wild, happy little family, and disappeared into the shadow of the big woods.

Perhaps that is why I never saw the old beech partridge drink from the brook. Nature has a fresher draught, of her own distilling, that is more to his tasting.

Earlier in the season I found another of his families near the same spot. I was stealing along a wood road when I ran plump upon them, scratching away at an ant hill in a sunny open spot. There was a wild flurry, as if a whirlwind had struck the ant hill; but it was only the wind of the mother bird's wings, whirling up the dust to blind my eyes and to hide the scampering retreat of her downy brood. Again her wings beat the ground, sending up a flurry of dead leaves, in

the midst of which the little partridges jumped and scurried away, so much like the leaves that no eye could separate them. Then the leaves settled slowly and the brood was gone, as if the ground had swallowed them up; while Mother Grouse went fluttering along just out of my reach, trailing a wing as if broken, falling prone on the ground, clucking and *kwitting* and whirling the leaves to draw my attention and bring me away from where the little ones were hiding.

I knelt down just within the edge of woods, whither I had seen the last laggard of the brood vanish like a brown streak, and began to look for them carefully. After a time I found one. He was crouched flat on a dead oak leaf, just under my nose, his color hiding him wonderfully. Something glistened in a tangle of dark roots. It was an eye, and presently I could make out a little head there. That was all I could find of the family, though a dozen more were close beside me, under the leaves mostly. As I backed away I put my hand on another before seeing him, and barely saved myself from hurting the little sly-boots, who never stirred a muscle, not even when I took away the leaf that covered him and put it back again softly.

Across the pathway was a thick scrub oak, under which I sat down to watch. Ten long minutes

passed, with nothing stirring, before Mother Grouse came stealing back. She clucked once — "Careful!" it seemed to say; and not a leaf stirred. She clucked again — did the ground open? There they were, a dozen or more of them, springing up from nowhere and scurrying with a thousand cheepings to tell her all about it. So she gathered them all close about her, and they vanished into the friendly shadows.

It was curious how jealously the old beech partridge watched over the solitudes where these interesting little families roamed. Though he seemed to care nothing about them, and was never seen near one of his families, he suffered no other cock partridge to come into his woods, or even to drum within hearing. In the winter he shared the southern pasture peaceably with twenty other grouse; and on certain days you might, by much creeping, surprise a whole company of them on a sunny southern slope, strutting and gliding, in and out and round about, with spread tails and drooping wings, going through all the movements of a grouse minuet. Once, in Indian summer, I crept up to twelve or fifteen of the splendid birds, who were going through their curious performance in a little opening among the berry bushes; and in the midst of them — more vain, more resplendent, strutting more

proudly and clucking more arrogantly than any other — was the old beech partridge.

But when the spring came, and the long rolling drum-calls began to throb through the budding woods, he retired to his middle range on the ridge, and marched from one end to the other, driving every other cock grouse out of hearing, and drubbing him soundly if he dared resist. Then, after a triumph, you would hear his loud drum-call rolling through the May splendor, calling as many wives as possible to share his rich living.

He had two drumming logs on this range, as I soon discovered; and once, while he was drumming on one log, I hid near the other and imitated his call fairly well by beating my hands on a blown bladder that I had buttoned under my jacket. The roll of a grouse drum is a curiously muffled sound; it is often hard to determine the spot or even the direction whence it comes; and it always sounds much farther away than it really is. This may have deceived the old beech partridge at first into thinking that he heard some other bird far away, on a ridge across the valley where he had no concern; for presently he drummed again on his own log. I answered it promptly, rolling back a defiance, and also telling any hen grouse on the range that here was another candidate willing to strut and

spread his tail and lift the resplendent ruff about his neck to win his way into her good graces, if she would but come to his drumming log and see him.

Some suspicion that a rival had come to his range must have entered the old beech partridge's head, for there was a long silence in which I could fancy him standing up straight and stiff on his drumming log, listening intently to locate the daring intruder, and holding down his bubbling wrath with difficulty.

Without waiting for him to drum again, I beat out a challenge. The roll had barely ceased when he came darting up the ridge, glancing like a bolt among the thick branches, and plunged down by his own log, where he drew himself up with marvelous suddenness to listen and watch for the intruder.

He seemed relieved that the log was not occupied, but he was still full of wrath and suspicion. He glided and dodged all about the place, looking and listening; then he sprang to his log and, without waiting to strut and spread his gorgeous feathers as usual, he rolled out the long call, drawing himself up straight the instant it was done, turning his head from side to side to catch the first beat of his rival's answer — "Come out, if you dare; drum, if you dare. Oh, you coward!" And he hopped, five or six high, excited hops, like a rooster before a storm, to the

other end of the log, and again his quick throbbing drum-call rolled through the woods.

Though I was near enough to see him clearly without my field glasses, I could not even then, nor at any other time when I have watched grouse drumming, determine just how the call is given. After a little while the excitement of a suspected rival's presence wore away, and he grew exultant, thinking that he had driven the rascal out of his woods. He strutted back and forth on the log, trailing his wings, spreading wide his beautiful tail, lifting his crest and his resplendent ruff. Suddenly he would draw himself up; there would be a flash of his wings up and down that no eye could follow, and I would hear a single throb of his drum. Another flash and another throb; then faster and faster, till he seemed to have two or three pairs of wings, whirring and running together like the spokes of a swift-moving wheel, and the drumbeats rolled together into a long call and died away in the woods.

Generally he stood up on his toes, as a rooster does when he flaps his wings before crowing; rarely he crouched down close to the log; but I doubt if he beat the wood with his wings, as is often claimed. Yet the two logs were different; one was dry and hard, the other mouldy and moss-grown; and the drum-calls were as different as the two logs. After

a time I could tell by the sound which log he was using at the first beat of his wings; but that, I think, was a matter of resonance, a kind of sounding-board effect, and not because the two sounded differently as he beat them. The call is undoubtedly made either by striking the wings together over his back or, as I am inclined to believe, by striking them on the down beat against his own sides.

Once I heard a wounded bird give three or four beats of his drum-call, and when I went into the grapevine thicket, where he had fallen, I found him lying flat on his back, beating his sides with his wings.

Whenever he drums he first struts, because he knows not how many pairs of bright eyes are watching him shyly out of the coverts. Once, when I had watched him strut and drum a few times, the leaves rustled, and two hen grouse emerged from opposite sides into the little opening where his log was. Then he strutted with greater vanity than before, while the two hen grouse went gliding about the place, searching for seeds apparently, but in reality watching his every movement out of their eye corners, and admiring him to his heart's content.

In winter I used to follow his trail through the snow to find what he had been doing, and what he

had found to eat in nature's scarce time. His worst enemies, the man and his dog, were no longer to be feared, being restrained by law, and he roamed the woods with greater freedom than ever. He seemed to know that he was safe at this time, and more than once I trailed him up to his hiding and saw him whirr away through the open woods, sending down a shower of snow behind him, as if in that curious way to hide his line of flight from my eyes.

There were other enemies, however, whom no law restrained, save the universal wood-laws of fear and hunger. Often I found the trail of a fox crossing his in the snow; and once I followed a double trail, fox over grouse, for nearly half a mile. The fox had struck the trail late the previous afternoon, and followed it to a bullbrier thicket, in the midst of which was a great cedar in which the old beech partridge roosted. The fox went twice around the tree, halting and looking up, then went straight away to the swamp, as if he knew it was of no use to watch longer.

Rarely, when the snow was deep, I found the place where he, or some other grouse, went to sleep on the ground. He would plunge down from a tree into the soft snow, driving into it head-first for three or four feet, then turn around and settle down in his white warm chamber for the night. I would find the small

hole where he plunged in at evening, and near it the great hole where he burst out when the light waked him. Taking my direction from his wing prints in the snow, I would follow to find where he lit, and then trace him on his morning wanderings.

One would think that this might be a dangerous proceeding, sleeping on the ground with no protection but the snow, and a score of hungry enemies prowling about the woods; but the grouse knows well that when the storms are out his enemies stay close at home, not being able to see or smell, and therefore afraid each one of his own enemies. There is always a truce in the woods during a snowstorm; and that is the reason why a grouse goes to sleep in the snow only while the flakes are still falling. When the storm is over and the snow has settled a bit, the fox will be abroad again; and then the grouse sleeps in the evergreens.

Once, however, the old beech partridge miscalculated. The storm ceased early in the evening, and hunger drove the fox out on a night when, ordinarily, he would have stayed under cover. Sometime about daybreak, before yet the light had penetrated to where the old beech partridge was sleeping, the fox found a hole in the snow, which told him that just in front of his hungry nose a grouse was hidden, all unconscious

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Thundered away to the safety and shelter of the pines

of danger. I found the spot, trailing the fox, a few hours later. How cautious he was! The sly trail was eloquent with hunger and anticipation. A few feet away from the promising hole he had stopped, looking keenly over the snow to find some suspicious roundness on the smooth surface. Ah! there it was, just by the edge of a juniper thicket. He crouched down, stole forward, pushing a deep trail with his body, settled himself firmly and sprang. And there, just beside the hole his paws had made in the snow, was another hole where the grouse had burst out, scattering snow all over his enemy, who had miscalculated by a foot, and thundered away to the safety and shelter of the pines.

There was another enemy, who ought to have known better, following the old beech partridge all one early spring when snow was deep and food scarce. One day, in crossing the partridge's southern range, I met a small boy, — a keen little fellow, with the instincts of a fox for hunting. He had always something interesting afoot, — minks, or muskrats, or a skunk, or a big owl, — so I hailed him with joy.

"Hello, Johnnie! what you after to-day — bears?"

But he only shook his head — a bit sheepishly, I thought — and talked of all things except the one that he was thinking about; and presently he vanished

down the old road. One of his jacket pockets bulged more than the other, and I knew there was a trap in it.

Late that afternoon I crossed his trail and, having nothing more interesting to do, followed it. It led straight to the bullbrier thicket where the old beech partridge roosted. I had searched for it many times in vain before the fox led me to it; but Johnnie, in some of his prowlings, had found tracks and a feather or two under a cedar branch, and knew just what it meant. His trap was there, in the very spot where, the night before, the old beech partridge had stood when he jumped for the lowest limb. Corn was scattered liberally about, and a bluejay that had followed Johnnie was already fast in the trap, caught at the base of his bill just under the eyes. He had sprung the trap in pecking at some corn that was fastened cunningly to the pan by fine wire.

When I took the jay carefully from the trap he played possum, lying limp in my hand till my grip relaxed, when he flew to a branch over my head, squalling and upbraiding me for having anything to do with such abominable inventions.

I hung the trap to a low limb of the cedar, with a note in its jaws telling Johnnie to come and see me next day. He came at dusk, shamefaced, and I read him a lecture on fair play and the difference between

a thieving mink and an honest partridge. But he chuckled over the bluejay, and I doubted the withholding power of a mere lecture; so, to even matters, I hinted of an otter slide I had discovered, and of a Saturday-afternoon tramp together. Twenty times, he told me, he had tried to snare the old beech partridge. When he saw the otter slide he forswore traps and snares for birds; and I left the place, soon after, with good hopes for the grouse, knowing that I had spiked the guns of his most dangerous enemy.

Years later I crossed the old pasture and went straight to the bullbrier tangle. There were tracks of a grouse in the snow, — blunt tracks that rested lightly on the soft whiteness, showing that Nature remembered his necessity and had caused his new snowshoes to grow famously. I hurried to the brook, a hundred memories thronging over me of happy days and rare sights when the wood folk revealed their little secrets. In the midst of them — *kwit! kwit!* and with a thunder of wings a grouse whirred away, wild and gray as the rare bird that lived there years before. And when I questioned a hunter, he said: "That ol' beech pa'tridge? Oh, yes, he 's there. He 'll stay there, too, till he dies of old age; 'cause you see, Mister, there ain't nobody in these parts spry enough to ketch 'im."

FOLLOWING THE DEER

I WAS camping one summer on a little lake — Deer Pond, the natives called it — a few miles back from a quiet summer resort on the Maine coast. Summer hotels and mackerel fishing and noisy excursions had lost their semblance to a charm; so I made a little tent, hired a canoe, and moved back into the woods.

It was better here. The days were still and long, and the nights full of peace. The air was good, for nothing but the wild creatures breathed it, and the firs had touched it with their fragrance. The far-away surge of the sea came up faintly till the spruces answered it, and both sounds went gossiping over the hills together. On all sides were the woods,

which, on the north especially, stretched away over a broken country beyond my farthest explorations.

Over against my tenting place a colony of herons had their nests in some dark hemlocks. They were interesting as a camp of gypsies, some going off in straggling bands to the coast at daybreak, others frogging in the streams, and a few solitary, patient, philosophical ones joining me daily in following the gentle art of Izaak Walton. And then, when the sunset came and the deep red glowed just behind the hemlocks, and the gypsy bands came home, I would see their sentinels posted here and there among the hemlock tips — still, dark, graceful silhouettes etched in sepia against the gorgeous afterglow — and hear the mothers croaking their ungainly babies to sleep in the tree tops.

Down at one end of the pond a brood of young black ducks were learning their daily lessons in hiding; at the other end a noisy kingfisher, an honest blue heron, and a thieving mink shared the pools and watched each other as rival fishermen. Hares by night, and squirrels by day, and wood mice at all seasons played round my tent, or came shyly to taste my bounty. A pair of big owls lived and hunted in a swamp hard by, who hooted dismally before the storms came, and sometimes swept within

the circle of my fire at night. Every morning a raccoon stopped at a little pool in the brook above my tent, to wash his food carefully ere taking it home. So there was plenty to do and plenty to learn, and the days passed all too swiftly.

I had been told by the village hunters that there were no deer; that they had vanished long since, hounded and crusted and chevied out of season, till life was not worth the living. So it was with a start of surprise and a thrill of new interest that I came upon the tracks of a large buck and two smaller deer on the shore one morning. I was following them eagerly when I ran plump upon Old Wally, the cunningest hunter and trapper in the whole region.

"Sho! Mister, what yer follerin?"

"Why, these deer tracks," I said simply.

Wally gave me a look of great pity.

"Guess you're green — one o' them city fellers, ain't ye, Mister? Them ere's sheep tracks — my sheep. Wandered off int' th' woods a spell ago, and I hain't seen the tarnal critters since. Came up here lookin' for um this mornin'."

I glanced at Wally's fish basket, and thought of the nibbled lily pads; but I said nothing. Wally was a great hunter, albeit jealous; apt to think of all the game in the woods as being sent by Providence

to help him get a lazy living; and I knew little about deer at that time. So I took him to camp, fed him, and sent him away.

"Kinder keep a lookout for my sheep, will ye, Mister, down 't this end o' the pond?" he said, pointing away from the deer tracks. "If ye see ary one, send out word, and I'll come and fetch 'im.—Need n't foller the tracks though; they wander like all possessed this time o' year," he added earnestly as he went away.

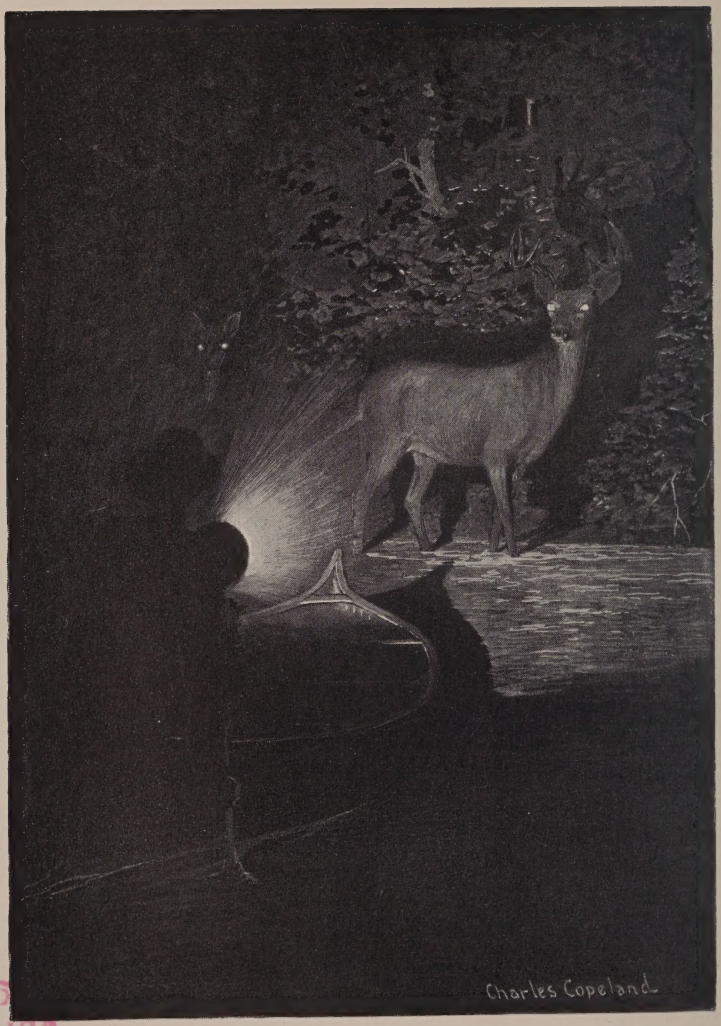
That afternoon I went over to a little pond, a mile distant from my camp, and deeper in the woods. The shore was well cut up with numerous deer tracks, and among the lily pads everywhere were signs of recent feeding. There was a man's track here too, which came cautiously out from a thick point of woods, and spied about on the shore, and went back again more cautiously than before. I took the measure of it back to camp, and found that it corresponded perfectly with the boot tracks of Old Wally. There were a few deer here, undoubtedly, which he was watching jealously for his own benefit in the fall hunting.

When the next still, misty night came, it found me afloat on the lonely little pond, with a dark lantern fastened to an upright stick just in front of me in the

canoe. In the shadow of the shores all was black as Egypt; but out in the middle the outlines of the pond could be followed vaguely by the heavy cloud of woods against the lighter sky. The stillness was intense; every slightest sound,—the creak of a bough or the ripple of a passing musquash, the *plunk* of a water drop into the lake or the snap of a rotten twig, broken by the weight of clinging mist,—came to the strained ear with startling suddenness. Then, as I waited and sifted the night sounds, a dainty *plop*, *plop*, *plop!* sent the canoe gliding like a shadow toward the shore whence the sounds had come.

When the lantern opened noiselessly, sending a broad beam of gray, full of shadows and misty lights, through the even blackness of the night, the deer stood revealed—a beautiful creature, shrinking back into the forest's shadow, yet ever drawn forward by the sudden wonder of the light.

She turned her head towards me, and her eyes blazed like great colored lights in the lantern's reflection. They fascinated me; I could see nothing but those great glowing spots, blazing and scintillating with a kind of intense fear and wonder out of the darkness. She turned away, unable to endure the glory any longer; then released from the fascination



Stared steadfastly at the light

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of her eyes, I saw her hurrying along the shore, a graceful living shadow among the shadows, rubbing her head among the bushes as if to brush away from her eyes the charm that dazzled them.

I followed a little way, watching every move, till she turned again, and for a longer time stared steadfastly at the light. It was harder this time to break away from its power. She came nearer two or three times, halting between dainty steps to stare and wonder, while her eyes blazed into mine. Then, as she faltered irresolutely, I reached forward and closed the lantern, leaving lake and woods in deeper darkness than before. At the sudden release I heard her plunge out of the water; but a moment later she was moving nervously among the trees, trying to stamp herself up to the courage point of coming back to investigate. And when I flashed my lantern at the spot she threw aside caution and came hurriedly down the bank again.

Later that night I heard other footsteps in the pond, and opened my lantern upon three deer, a doe, a fawn and a large buck, feeding at short intervals among the lily pads. The buck was wild; after one look he plunged into the woods, whistling danger to his companions. But the fawn heeded nothing, knew nothing for the moment save the fascination of the

wonderful glare out there in the darkness. Had I not shut off the light, I think he would have climbed into the canoe in his intense wonder.

I saw the little fellow again, in a curious way, a few nights later. A wild storm was raging over the woods. Under its lash the great trees writhed and groaned; and the "voices"—that strange phenomenon of the forest and rapids—were calling wildly through the roar of the storm and the rush of rain on innumerable leaves. I had gone out on the old wood road, to lose myself for a little while in the intense darkness and uproar, and to feel again the wild thrill of the elements. But the night was too dark, the storm too fierce. Every few moments I would blunder against a tree, which told me I was off the road; and to lose the road meant to wander all night in the storm-swept woods. So I went back for my lantern, with which I again started down the old cart path, a little circle of wavering, jumping shadows about me, the one gray spot in the midst of universal darkness.

I had gone but a few hundred yards when there was a rush—it was not the wind or the rain—in a thicket on my right. Something jumped into the circle of light. Two bright spots burned out of the darkness, then two more; and with strange bleats a

deer came close to me with her fawn. I stood stock-still, with a thrill in my spine that was not altogether of the elements, while the deer moved uneasily back and forth. The doe wavered between fear and fascination; but the fawn knew no fear, or perhaps he knew only the great fear of the uproar around him; for he came close beside me, rested his nose an instant against the light, then thrust his head between my arm and body, so as to shield his eyes, and pressed close against my side, shivering with cold and fear, pleading dumbly for my protection against the pitiless storm.

I refrained from touching the little thing, for no wild creature likes to be handled, while his mother called in vain from the leafy darkness. When I turned to go he followed me close, still trying to thrust his face under my arm; and I had to close the light with a sharp click before he bounded away down the road, where one who knew better than I how to take care of a frightened innocent was, no doubt, waiting to receive him.

I gave up everything else but fishing after that, and took to watching the deer; but there was little to be learned in the summer woods. Once I came upon the big buck lying down in a thicket. I was following his track, trying to learn the Indian

trick of sign-trailing, when he shot up in front of me like Jack-in-a-box, and was gone before I knew what it meant. From the impressions in the moss, I concluded that he slept with all four feet under him, ready to shoot up at an instant's notice, with power enough in his spring to clear any obstacle near him. And then I thought of the way a cow gets up, first one end, then the other, rising from the fore knees at last with puff and grunt and clacking of joints; and I took my first lesson in wholesome respect for the creature whom I already considered mine by right of discovery, and whose splendid head I saw, in anticipation, adorning the hall of my house — to the utter discomfiture of Old Wally.

At another time I crept up to an old road beyond the little deer pond, where three deer, a mother with her fawn, and a young spike-buck, were playing. They kept running up and down, leaping over the trees that lay across the road with marvelous ease and grace — that is, the two larger deer. The little fellow followed awkwardly; but he had the spring in him, and was learning rapidly to gather himself for the rise, and lift his hind feet at the top of his jump, and come down with all fours together, instead of sprawling clumsily, as a horse does.

I saw the perfection of it a few days later. I was sitting before my tent door at twilight, watching the herons, when there was a shot and a sudden crash over on their side. In a moment the big buck plunged out of the woods and went leaping in swift bounds along the shore, head high, antlers back, the mighty muscles driving him up and onward as if invisible wings were bearing him. A dozen great trees were fallen across his path, one of which, as I afterwards measured, lay a clear eight feet above the sand. But he never hesitated nor broke his splendid stride. He would rush at a tree; rise light and swift till above it, where he turned as if on a pivot, with head thrown back to the wind, actually resting an instant in air at the very top of his jump; then shoot downward, not falling but driven still by the impulse of his great muscles. When he struck, all four feet were close together; and almost quicker than the eye could follow he was in the air again, sweeping along the water's edge, or rising like a bird over the next obstacle.

Just below me was a stream, with muddy shores on both sides. I looked to see if he would stog himself there or turn aside; but he knew the place better than I, and that just under the soft mud the sand lay firm and sure. He struck the muddy place only twice,

once on either side the fifteen-foot stream, sending out a light shower of mud in all directions; then, because the banks on my side were steep, he leaped for the cover of the woods and was gone.

I thought I had seen the last of him, when I heard him coming, *bump! bump! bump!* the swift blows of his hoofs sounding all together on the forest floor. So he flashed by, between me and my tent door, barely swerved aside for my fire, and gave me another beautiful run down the old road, rising and falling light as thistle-down, with the old trees arching over him and brushing his antlers as he rocketed along.

The last branch had hardly swished behind him when, across the pond, the underbrush parted cautiously and Old Wally appeared, trailing a long gun. He had followed scarcely a dozen of the buck's jumps when he looked back and saw me watching him from beside a great maple.

"Just a-follerin one o' my tarnal sheep. Strayed off day 'fore yesterday. Hain't seen 'im, hev ye?" he bawled across.

"Just went along; ten or twelve points on his horns. And say, Wally"—

The old sinner, who was glancing about furtively to see if the white sand showed any blood stains, looked up quickly at the changed tone—

"You let those sheep of yours alone till the first of October; then I'll help you round 'em up. Just now they're worth forty dollars apiece to the state. I'll see that the warden collects it, too, if you shoot another."

"Sho! Mister, I ain't a-shootin' no deer. Hain't seen a deer round here in ten year or more. I just took a crack at a pa'tridge 'at *kwitted* at me, top o' a stump"—

But as he vanished among the hemlocks, trailing his old gun, I knew that he understood the threat. To make the matter sure I drove the deer out of the pond that night, giving them the first of a series of rude lessons in caution, until the falling leaves should make them wild enough to take care of themselves.

STILL HUNTING

October, the superb month for one who loves the forest, found me again in the same woods, this time not to watch and learn, but to follow the big buck to his death. Old Wally was ahead of me; but the falling leaves had done their work well. The deer had left the pond at his approach. Here and there on the ridges I found their tracks, and saw

them at a distance, shy, wild, alert, ready to take care of themselves in any emergency. The big buck led them everywhere. Already his spirit, grown keen in long battle against his enemies, dominated them all. Even the fawns had learned fear, and followed it as their salvation.

Then began the most fascinating experience that comes to one who haunts the woods — the first, thrilling, glorious days of the still-hunter's schooling, with the frost-colored October woods for a schoolroom, and Nature herself for the all-wise teacher. Daylight found me far afield, while the heavy mists hung low and the night smells still clung to the first fallen leaves, moving swift and silent through the chill fragrant mistiness of the lowlands, eye and ear alert for every sign, and face set to the heights where the deer were waiting. Noon found me miles away on the hills, munching my crust thankfully in a sunny opening of the woods, with a brook's music tinkling among the mossy stones at my feet, and the gorgeous crimson and green and gold of the hillside stretching down and away, like a vast Oriental rug of a giant's weaving, to the flash and blue gleam of the distant sea. And everywhere — Nature's last subtle touches to her picture — the sense of a filmy veil let down ere the end was reached, a soft haze on the glowing

hilltops, a sheen as of silver mist along the stream in the valley, a fleecy light-shot cloud on the sea, to suggest more, and more beautiful, beyond the veil.

Evening found me hurrying homeward through the short twilight, along silent wood roads from which the birds had departed, breathing deep of the pure air with its pungent tang of ripened leaves, sniffing the first night smells, listening now for the yap of a fox, now for the distant bay of a dog to guide me in a short cut over the hills to where my room in the old farmhouse was waiting.

It mattered little that, far behind me (though not so far from where the trail ended), the big buck began his twilight wandering along the ridges, sniffing alertly at the vanishing scent of the man on his feeding ground. The best things that a hunter brings home are in his heart, not in his game bag; and a free deer meant another long glorious day following him through the October woods, making the tyro's mistakes, to be sure, but feeling also the tyro's thrill and the tyro's wonder, and the consciousness of growing power and skill to read in a new language the secrets that the moss and leaves hide so innocently.

There was so much to note and learn and remember in those days! A bit of moss with that curiously measured angular cut in it, as if the wood folk had

taken to studying Euclid, — how wonderful it was at first! The deer had been here; his foot drew that sharp triangle; and I must measure and feel it carefully, and press aside the moss, and study the leaves, to know whether it were my big buck or no, and how long since he had passed, and whether he were feeding or running or just nosing about and watching the valley below. And all that is much to learn from a tiny triangle in the moss, with imaginary *a*, *b*, *c's* clinging to the dried moss blossoms.

How careful one had to be! Every shift of wind, every cloud shadow had to be noted. The lesson of a dewdrop, splashed from a leaf in the early morning; the testimony of a crushed flower, or a broken brake, or a bending grass blade; the counsel of a bit of bark frayed from a birch tree, with a shred of deer-velvet clinging to it, — all these were vastly significant and interesting. Every copse and hiding place and cathedral aisle of the big woods in front must be searched with quiet eyes far ahead, as one glided silently from tree to tree. That depression in the gray moss of a fir thicket, with two others near it — three deer lay down there last night; no, this morning; no, scarcely an hour ago, and the dim traces along the ridge show no sign of hurry or alarm. So I move on, following surely the trail that, only a few days since, would have

been invisible as the trail of a fish in the lake to my unschooled eyes, searching, searching everywhere for dim forms gliding among the trees, till — a scream, a whistle, a rush away! And I know that the bluejay, which has been gliding after me curiously the last ten minutes, has fathomed my intentions and flown ahead to alarm the deer, which are now bounding away for denser cover.

I brush ahead heedlessly, knowing that caution here only wastes time, and study the fresh trail where the quarry jumped away in alarm. Straight down the wind it goes. Cunning old buck! He has no idea what Bluejay's alarm was about, but a warning, whether of crow or jay or tainted wind or snapping twig, is never lost on the wood folk. Now as he bounds along, cleaving the woods like a living bolt, yet stopping short every hundred yards or so to whirl and listen and sort the messages that the wood wires bring to him, he is perfectly sure of himself and his little flock, knowing that if danger follow down wind, his own nose will tell him all about it. I glance at the sun; only another hour of light, and I am six miles from home. I glance at the jay, flitting about restlessly in a mixture of mischief and curiosity, whistling his *too-loo-loo* loudly as a sign to the fleeing game that I am right here and that

he sees me. Then I take up the back trail, planning another day.

So the days went by, one after another; the big buck, aided by his friends the birds, held his own against my craft and patience. He grew more wild and alert with every hunt, and kept so far ahead of me that only once, before the snow blew, did I have even the chance of stalking him, and then the cunning old fellow foiled me again masterfully.

Old Wally was afield too; but, so far as I could read from the woods' record, he fared no better than I on the trail of the buck. Once, when I knew my game was miles ahead, I heard the long-drawn *whang* of Wally's old gun across a little valley. Presently the brush began to crackle, and a small doe came jumping among the trees straight towards me. Within thirty feet she saw me, caught herself at the top of her jump, came straight down, and stood an instant as if turned to stone, with a spruce branch bending over to hide her from my eyes. Then, when I moved not, having no desire to kill a doe but only to watch the beautiful creature, she turned, glided a few steps, and went bounding away along the ridge.

Old Wally came in a little while, not following the trail, — he had no skill nor patience for that, — but with a woodsman's instinct following up the general

direction of his game. Not far from where the doe had first appeared he stopped, looked all around keenly, then rested his hands on the end of his long gun barrel, and put his chin on his hands.

"Drat it all! Never tetched 'im again. That paowder o' mine hain't wuth a cent. You wait till snow blows," — addressing the silent woods at large, — "then I 'll get me some paowder as is paowder, and foller the critter, and I 'll show ye"—

Old Wally said never a word, but all this was in his face and attitude as he leaned moodily on his long gun. And I watched him, chuckling, from my hiding among the rocks, till with curious instinct he vanished down the ridge behind the very thicket where I had seen the doe flash out of sight a moment before.

When I saw him again he was deep in less creditable business. It was a perfect autumn day, — the air full of light and color, the fragrant woods resting under the soft haze like a great bouquet of Nature's own culling, birds, bees and squirrels frolicking all day long amidst the trees, yet doing an astonishing amount of work in gathering each one his harvest for the cold dark days that were coming.

At daylight, from the top of a hill, I looked down on a little clearing and saw the first signs of the game I

was seeking. There had been what old people call a duck-frost. In the meadows and along the fringes of the woods the white rime lay thick and powdery on grass and dead leaves; every foot that touched it left a black mark, as if seared with a hot iron, when the sun came up and shone upon it. Across the field three black trails meandered away from the brook; but alas! under the fringe of evergreen was another trail, that of a man, which crept and halted and hid, yet drew nearer and nearer the point where the three deer trails vanished into the wood. Then I found powder marks, and some brush that was torn by buck-shot, and three trails that bounded away, and a tiny splash of deeper red on a crimson maple leaf. So I left the deer to the early hunter and wandered away up the hill for a long, lazy, satisfying day in the woods alone.

Presently I came to a low brush fence running zigzag through the woods, with snares set every few yards in the partridge and rabbit runs. At the third opening a fine cock partridge swung limp and lifeless from a twitch-up. The cruel wire had torn his neck under his beautiful ruff; the broken wing quills showed how terrible had been his struggle. Hung by the neck till dead! — an atrocious fate to mete out to a noble bird. I followed the hedge of snares for a

couple of hundred yards, finding three more strangled grouse and a brown rabbit. Then I sat down in a beautiful spot to watch the life about me, and to catch the snarer at his abominable work.

The sun climbed higher and blotted out the four trails in the field below. Red squirrels came down close to my head to chatter and scold and drive me out of the solitude. A beautiful gray squirrel went tearing by among the branches, pursued by one of the savage little reds that nipped and snarled at his heels. The two cannot live together, and the gray must always go. Jays stopped spying on the squirrels — to see and remember where their winter stores were hidden — and lingered near me, whistling their curiosity at the silent man below. None but jays gave any heed to the five grim corpses swinging by their necks over the deadly hedge, and to them it was only a new sensation.

Then a cruel thing happened, — one of the many tragedies that pass unnoticed in the woods. There was a scurry in the underbrush, and strange cries like those of an agonized child, only tiny and distant, as if heard in a phonograph. Over the sounds a crow hovered and rose and fell, in his intense absorption seeing nothing but the creature below. Suddenly he swooped like a hawk into a thicket, and out of the

cover sprang a leveret (young hare), only to crouch shivering in the open space under a hemlock's drooping branches. There the crow headed him, struck once, twice, three times, straight hard blows with his powerful beak; and when I ran to the spot the leveret lay quite dead with his skull split, while the crow went flapping wildly to the tree tops, giving the danger cry to the flock that was gossiping in the sunshine on the ridge across the valley.

The woods were all still after that; jays and squirrels seemed appalled at the tragedy, and avoided me as if I were responsible for the still little body under the hemlock tips. An hour passed; then, a quarter-mile away, in the direction that the deer had taken in the early morning, a single jay set up his cry, the cry of something new passing in the woods. Two or three others joined him; the cry came nearer. A flock of crossbills went whistling overhead, coming from the same direction. Then, as I slipped away into an evergreen thicket, a partridge came whirring up, and darted by me like a brown arrow driven by the bending branches behind him, flicking the twigs sharply with his wings as he drove along. And then, on the path of his last forerunner, Old Wally appeared, his keen eyes searching his murderous gibbet-line expectantly.

Now Old Wally was held in great reputation by the Nimrods of the village, because he hunted partridges, not with "scatter-gun" and dog, — such amateurish bungling he disdained and swore against, — but in the good old-fashioned way of stalking with a rifle. And when he brought his bunch of birds to market, his admirers pointed with pride to the marks of his wondrous skill. Here was a bird with the head hanging by a thread of skin; there one with its neck broken; there a furrow along the top of the head; and here — perfect work! — a partridge with both eyes gone, showing the course of his unerring bullet.

Not ten yards from my hiding place he took down a partridge from its gallows, fumbled a pointed stick out of his pocket, ran it through the bird's neck, and stowed the creature that had died miserably, without a chance for its life, away in one of his big pockets, a self-satisfied grin on his face as he glanced down the hedge and saw another bird swinging. So he followed his hangman's hedge, treating each bird to his pointed stick, carefully resetting the snares after him and clearing away the fallen leaves from the fatal pathways. When he came to the rabbit he harled him dexterously, slipped him over his long gun barrel, took his bearings in a quick look, and struck over the ridge for another southern hillside.

Here, at last, was the secret of Wally's boasted skill in partridge hunting with a rifle. Spite of my indignation at the snare line, the cruel death which gaped day and night for the game as it ran about heedlessly in the fancied security of its own coverts, a humorous, half shame-faced feeling of admiration would creep in as I thought of the old sinner's cunning, and remembered his look of disdain when he met me one day, with a "scatter-gun" in my hands and old Don following obediently at heel. Thinking that in his long life he must have learned many things in the woods that I would be glad to know, I had invited him cordially to join me. But he only withered me with the contempt in his hawk eyes, and wiggled his toe as if holding back a kick from my honest dog with difficulty.

"Go hunting with ye? Not much, Mister. Scarin' a pa'tridge to death with a dum dog, and then turnin' a handful o' shot loose on the critter, an' call it huntin'! That 's the way to kill a pa'tridge, the on'y decent way" — and he pulled a bird out of his pocket, pointing to a clean hole through the head where the eyes had been.

When he had gone I kicked the hedge to pieces quickly, cut the twitch-ups at the butts and threw them with their wire nooses far into the thickets, and

posted a warning in a cleft stick on the site of the last gibbet. Then I followed Wally to a second and third line of snares, which were treated in the same rough way, and watched him with curiously mingled feelings of detestation and amusement as he sneaked down the dense hillside with tread light as Leatherstocking, the old gun over his shoulder, his pockets bulging enormously, and a string of hanged rabbits swinging to and fro on his gun barrel, as if in death they had caught the dizzy motion and could not quit it while the woods they had loved and lived in threw their long sad shadows over them. So they came to the meadow, into which they had so often come limping down to play or feed among the twilight shadows, and crossed it for the last time on Wally's gun barrel, swinging, swinging.

The leaves were falling thickly now; they formed a dry, hard carpet over which it was impossible to follow game accurately, and they rustled a sharp warning underfoot if but a wood mouse ran over them. It was of little use to still-hunt the wary old buck till the rains should soften the carpet, or a snowfall make tracking like boys' play. But I tried it once more; found the quarry on a ridge deep in the woods, and followed — more by good-luck than by good management — till, late in the afternoon, I saw

the buck with two smaller deer standing far away on a half-cleared hillside, quietly watching a wide stretch of country below. Beyond them the ridge narrowed gradually to a long neck, ending in a high open bluff above the river.

There I tried my last hunter's dodge — manœuvered craftily till near the deer, which were hidden by dense thickets, and rushed straight at them, thinking they would either break away down the open hillside, and so give me a running shot, or else rush straightaway at the sudden alarm and be caught on the bluff beyond.

Was it simple instinct, I wonder, or did the buck that had grown old in hunter's wiles feel what was passing in my mind, and like a flash take the chance that would save, not only his own life, but the lives of the two that followed him? At the first alarm they separated; the two smaller deer broke away down the hillside, giving me as pretty a shot as one could wish. But I scarcely noticed them; my eyes were following eagerly a swift waving of brush tops, which told me that the big buck was jumping away, straight into the natural trap ahead.

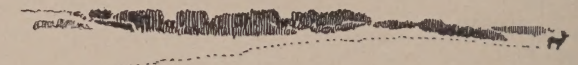
I followed on the run till the ridge narrowed so that I could see across it on either side, then slowly, carefully, steadying my nerves for the shot. The

river was all about him now, too wide to jump, too steep-banked to climb down; the only way out was past me. I gripped the rifle hard, holding it at a ready as I moved forward, watching either side for a slinking form among the scattered coverts. At last, at last! and how easy, how perfectly I had trapped him! My heart was singing as I stole along.

The tracks moved straight on; first an easy run, then a swift, hard rush as they approached the river. But what was this? The whole end of the bluff was under my eye, and no buck standing at bay or running wildly along the bank to escape. The tracks moved straight on to the edge in great leaps; my heart quickened its beat as if I were nerving myself for a supreme effort. Would he do it? would he dare?

A foot this side the brink the lichens were torn away where the sharp hoofs had cut down to solid earth. Thirty feet away, well over the farther bank and ten feet below the level where I stood, the fresh earth showed clearly among the hoof-torn moss. Far below, the river fretted and roared in a white rush of rapids. He had taken the jump, a jump that made one's nostrils spread and his breath come hard as he measured it with his eye. Somewhere, over in the spruces' shadow there, he was hiding, watching me no doubt to see if I would dare follow.

That was the last of the autumn woods for me. If I had only seen him — just one splendid glimpse as he shot over and poised in mid-air, turning for the down plunge! That was my only regret as I turned slowly away, the river singing beside me and the shadows lengthening along the home trail.



WINTER TRAILS

THE snow had come, and with it a Christmas holiday. For weeks I had looked longingly out of college windows as the first tracking-snows came sifting down, my thoughts turning from books and the problems of human wisdom to the winter woods, with their wide white pages written all over by the feet of wild things. Then the sun would shine again, and I knew that the records were washed clean, and the hard-packed leaves as innocent of footmarks as the beach where plover feed when a great wave has chased them away. On the twentieth a change came. Outside the snow fell heavily, two days and a night; inside, books were packed away, professors said Merry Christmas, and students were scattering, like a bevy of flushed quail, to all points of the compass for the holidays. The

afternoon of the twenty-first found me again in my room under the eaves of the old farmhouse.

Before dark I had taken a wide run over the hills and through the woods to the place of my summer camp. How wonderful it all was! The great woods were covered deep with their pure white mantle; not a fleck, not a track soiled its even whiteness; for the last soft flakes were lingering in the air, and fox and grouse and hare and lucivee were still keeping the storm truce, hidden deep in their coverts. Every fir and spruce and hemlock had gone to building fairy grottoes as the snow packed their lower branches, under which all sorts of wonders and beauties might be hidden, to say nothing of the wild things for whom Nature had been building innumerable tents of white and green as they slept. The silence was absolute, the forest's unconscious tribute to the Wonder Worker. Even the trout brook, running black as night among its white-capped boulders and delicate arches of frost and fern work, between massive banks of feathery white and green, had stopped its idle chatter and tinkled a low bell under the ice, as if only the Angelus could express the wonder of the world.

As I came back softly in the twilight a movement in an evergreen ahead caught my eye, and I stopped for one of the rare sights of the woods, — a partridge

going to sleep in a warm room of his own making. He looked all about among the trees most carefully, listened, *kwit-kwitted* in a low voice to himself, then, with a sudden plunge, swooped downward head-first into the snow. I stole to the spot where he had disappeared, noted the direction of his tunnel, and fell forward with arms outstretched, thinking perhaps to catch him under me and examine his feet to see how his natural snowshoes (Nature's winter gift to every grouse) were developing, before letting him go again. But the grouse was an old bird, not to be caught napping, who had thought on the possibilities of being followed ere he made his plunge. He had ploughed under the snow for a couple of feet, then swerved sharply to the left and made a little chamber for himself just under some snow-packed spruce tips, with a foot of snow for a blanket over him. When I fell forward, disturbing his rest most rudely ere he had time to wink the snow out of his eyes, he burst out with a great whirr and sputter between my left hand and my head, scattering snow all over me, and thundered off through the startled woods, flicking a branch here and there with his wings, and shaking down a great white shower as he rushed away for deeper solitudes. There, no doubt, he went to sleep in the evergreens, congratulating himself on his escape

and preferring to take his chances with the owl, rather than with some other ground-prowler that might come nosing into his hole before the light snow had time to fill it up effectually behind him.

Next morning I was early afield, heading for a ridge where I thought the deer of the neighborhood might congregate with the intention of yarding for the winter. At the foot of a wild little natural meadow, made centuries ago by the beavers, I found the trail of two deer which had been helping themselves to some hay that had been cut and stacked there the previous summer. My big buck was not with them; so I left the trail in peace to push through a belt of woods and across a pond to an old road that led for a mile or two towards the ridge I was seeking.

Early as I was, the wood folk were ahead of me. Their tracks were everywhere, eager, hungry tracks, that poked their noses into every possible hiding place of food or game, showing how the two-days' fast had whetted their appetites and set them to running keenly the moment the last flakes were down and the storm truce ended.

A suspicious-looking clump of evergreens, where something had brushed the snow rudely from the feathery tips, stopped me as I hurried down the old road. Under the evergreens was a hole in the snow,

and at the bottom of the hole hard inverted cups made by deer's feet. I followed on to another hole in the snow (it could scarcely be called a trail) and then to another, and another, some twelve or fifteen feet apart, leading in swift bounds to some big timber. There the curious track separated into three deer trails, one of which might well be that of a ten-point buck. Here was luck,—luck to find my quarry so early on the first day out, and better luck that, during my long absence, the cunning animal had kept himself and his consort clear of Old Wally and his devices.

When I ran to examine the back trail more carefully, I found that the deer had passed the night in a dense thicket of evergreen, on a hilltop overlooking the road. They had come down the hill, picking their way among the stumps of a burned clearing, stepping carefully in each other's tracks so as to make but a single trail. At the road they had leaped clear across from one thicket to another, leaving never a trace on the bare even whiteness. One might have passed along the road a score of times without noticing that game had crossed. There was no doubt now that these were deer that had been often hunted, and that had learned their cunning from long experience.

I followed them rapidly till they began feeding in a little valley, then with much caution, stealing from tree to thicket, giving scant attention to the trail, but searching the woods ahead; for the last "sign" showed that I was now but a few minutes behind the deer. There they were at last, two graceful forms gliding like gray shadows among the snow-laden branches. But in vain I searched for a lordly head with wide rough antlers sweeping proudly over the brow; my buck was not there. Scarcely had I made the discovery when there was a whistle and a plunge up on the hill on my left, and I had one swift glimpse of him, a splendid creature, as he bounded away.

By way of general precaution, or else led by some strange sixth sense of danger, he had left his companions feeding and mounted the hill, where he could look back on his own track. There he had been watching me for half an hour, till I approached too near, when he sounded the alarm and was off. I read it all from the trail a few moments later.

It was of no use to follow him, for he ran straight down wind. The two others had gone quartering off at right angles to his course, obeying his signal promptly, but having as yet no idea of what danger followed them. When alarmed in this way, deer never run far before halting to sniff and listen. Then, if

not disturbed, they run off again, circling back and down wind so as to catch from a distance the scent of anything that follows on their trail.

I sat still where I was for a good hour, watching the chickadees and red squirrels that found me speedily, and refusing to move for all the peekings and whistlings of a jay that would fain satisfy his curiosity as to whether I meant harm to the deer, or were just benumbed by the cold and incapable of further mischief. When I went on I left some scattered bits of meat from my lunch to keep him busy in case the deer were near; but there was no need of the precaution. The two had learned the leader's lesson of caution well, and ran for a mile, with many haltings and circlings, before they began to feed again. Even then they moved along at a good pace as they fed, till a mile farther on, when, as I had forelayed, the buck came down from a hill to join them, and all three moved off toward the big ridge, feeding as they went.

Then began a long chase, a chase which for the deer meant a straightaway game, and for me a series of wide circles — never following the trail directly, but approaching it at intervals from leeward, hoping to circle ahead of the deer and stalk them at last from an unexpected quarter.

Once, when I looked down from a bare hilltop into a valley where the trail ran, I had a most interesting glimpse of the big buck doing the same thing from a hill farther on — too far away for a shot, but near enough to see plainly through my field glass. The deer were farther ahead than I supposed. They had made a run for it, intending to rest after first putting a good space between them and anything that might follow. Now they were undoubtedly lying down in some far-away thicket, their minds at rest, but their four feet doubled under them for a jump at short notice. Trust your nose, but keep your feet under you — that is deer wisdom on going to sleep. Meanwhile, to take no chances, the wary old leader had circled back, to wind the trail and watch it awhile from a distance before joining them in their rest.

He stood stock-still in his hiding, so still that one might have passed close by without noticing him. But his head was above the low evergreens; eyes, ears, and nose were busy giving him perfect report of everything that passed in the woods.

I started to stalk him promptly, creeping up the hill behind him, chuckling to myself at the rare sport of catching a wild thing at his own game. But before I sighted him again he grew uneasy (the snow tells everything), trotted down hill to the trail, and put his

nose into it here and there to be sure it was not polluted. Then — another of his endless devices to make the noonday *siesta* full of contentment — he followed the back track a little way, stepping carefully in his own footprints; branched off on the other side of the trail, and so circled swiftly back to join his little flock, leaving behind him a sad puzzle of disputing tracks for any novice that might follow him.

So the interesting chase went on all day, skill against keener cunning, instinct against finer instinct, through the white wonder of the winter woods, till, late in the afternoon, it swung back towards the starting point. The deer had undoubtedly intended to begin their yard that day on the ridge I had selected; for at noon I crossed the trail of the two from the haystack, heading as if by mutual understanding in that direction. But the big buck, feeling that he was followed, cunningly led his charge away from the spot, so as to give no hint of the proposed winter quarters to the enemy that was after him. Just as the long shadows were stretching across all the valleys from hill to hill, and the sun vanished into the last gray bank of clouds on the horizon, my deer recrossed the old road, leaping it, as in the morning, so as to leave no telltale track, and climbed the hill to the dense thicket where they had passed the previous night.

Here was my last chance, and I studied it deliberately. The deer were there, safe within the evergreens, I had no doubt, using their eyes for the open hillside in front and their noses for the woods behind. It was useless to attempt stalking from any direction, for the cover was so thick that a fox could hardly creep through without alarming ears far less sensitive than a deer's. Skill had failed; their cunning was too much for me. I must now try an appeal to curiosity.

I crept up the hill flat on my face, keeping stump or scrub spruce always between me and the thicket on the hilltop. The wind was in my favor; I had only their eyes to consider. Somewhere, just within the shadow, at least one pair were sweeping the back track keenly; so I kept well away from it, creeping slowly up till I rested behind a great burned stump within forty yards of my game. There I fastened a red bandanna handkerchief to a stick and waved it slowly above the stump.

Almost instantly there was a snort and a rustle of bushes in the thicket above me. Peeking out I saw the evergreens moving nervously; a doe's head appeared, her ears set forward, her eyes glistening. I waved the handkerchief more erratically. My rifle lay across the stump's roots, pointing straight at her;

but she was not the game I was hunting. Some more waving and dancing of the bright color, some more nervous twitchings and rustlings in the evergreens, then a whistle and a rush; the doe disappeared; the movement ceased; the thicket was silent as the winter woods behind me.

"They are just inside," I thought, "pawing the snow to get their courage up to come and see." So the handkerchief danced on — one, two, five minutes passed in silence; then something made me turn round. There in plain sight behind me, just this side the fringe of evergreen that lined the old road, stood my three deer in a row — the big buck on the right — like three beautiful statues, their ears all forward, their eyes fixed with intensest curiosity on the man lying at full length in the snow with the queer red flag above his head.

My first motion broke up the pretty tableau. Before I could reach for my rifle the deer whirled and vanished like three winks, leaving the heavy evergreen tips nodding and blinking behind them in a shower of snow.

Tired as I was, I took a last run to see from the trail how it all happened. The deer had been standing just within the thicket as I approached. All three had seen the handkerchief; the tracks showed

that they had pawed the snow and moved about nervously. When the leader whistled they had bounded straightaway down the steep on the other side. But the farms lay in that direction, so they had skirted the base of the hill, keeping within the fringe of woods and heading back for their morning trail, till the red flag caught their eye again, and strong curiosity had halted them for another look.

Thus the long hunt ended at twilight within sight of the spot where it began in the gray morning stillness. With marvelous cunning the deer circled into their old tracks and followed them till night turned them aside into a thicket. This I discovered at daylight next morning.

That day a change came; first a south wind, then in succession a thaw, a mist, a rain turning to snow, a cold wind and a bitter frost. Next day when I entered the woods a brittle crust made silent traveling impossible, and over the rocks and bare places was a sheet of ice covered thinly with snow.

I was out all day, less in hope of finding deer than of watching the wild things; but at noon, as I sat eating my lunch, I heard a rapid running, *crunch*, *crunch*, *crunch*, on the ridge above me. I stole up, quietly as I could, to find the fresh trails of my three deer. They were running from fright evidently, and

were very tired, as the short irregular jumps showed. Once, where the two leaders cleared a fallen log, the third deer had fallen heavily; and all three trails showed blood stains where the crust had cut into their legs.

I waited there on the trail to see what was following — to give right of way to any hunter, but with a good stout stick handy, for dealing with dogs, which sometimes ran wild in the woods and harried the deer. For a long quarter-hour the woods were all still; then the jays, which had come whistling up on the trail, flew back screaming and scolding, and a huge yellow mongrel, showing hound's blood in his ears and nose, came slipping, limping, whining over the crust. I waited behind a tree till he was up with me, when I jumped out and caught him a resounding thump on the ribs. As he ran yelping away I fired my rifle over his head, and sent the good club with a vengeance to knock his heels from under him. A fresh outburst of howls inspired me with hope. Perhaps he would remember now to let deer alone for the winter.

Above the noise of canine lamentation I caught the faint click of snowshoes, and hid again to catch the cur's owner at his contemptible work. But the sound stopped far back on the trail at the sudden uproar.

Through the trees I caught glimpses of a fur cap and a long gun and the hawk face of Old Wally, peeking, listening, creeping on the trail, and stepping gingerly at last down the valley, ashamed or afraid of being caught at his unlawful hunting. "An ill wind, but it blows me good," I thought, as I took up the trail of the deer, half ashamed myself to take advantage of them when tired by the dog's chasing.

There was no need of commiseration, however; now that the dog was out of the way they could take care of themselves very well. I found them resting only a short distance ahead; but when I attempted to stalk them from leeward the noise of my approach on the crust sent them off with a rush before I caught even a glimpse of them in their thicket.

I gave up caution then and there. I was fresh and the deer were tired,—why not run them down and get a fair shot before the sun went down and left the woods too dark to see a rifle sight? I had heard that the Indians used sometimes to try running a deer down afoot in the old days; here was the chance to try a new experience. It was fearfully hard traveling without snowshoes, to be sure; but that seemed only to even-up chances fairly with the deer. At the thought I ran on, giving no heed when the quarry jumped again just ahead of me, but pushing them

steadily, mile after mile, till I realized with a thrill that I was gaining rapidly, that their pauses grew more and more frequent, and I had constant glimpses of deer ahead among the trees — never of the big buck, but of the two does, who were struggling desperately to follow their leader as he kept well ahead of them breaking the way. Then realizing, I think, that he was followed by strength rather than by skill or cunning, the noble old fellow tried a last trick, which came near being the end of my hunting altogether.

The trail turned suddenly to a high open ridge with scattered thickets here and there. As they labored up the slope I had the does in plain sight. On top the snow was light, and they bounded ahead with fresh strength. The trail led straight along the edge of a cliff, beyond which the deer had vanished. They had stopped running here; I noticed with amazement that they had walked with quick short steps across the open. Eager for a sight of the buck, I saw only the thin powdering of snow; I forgot the glare ice that covered the rock beneath. The deer's sharp hoofs had clung to the very edge securely. My heedless feet had barely struck the rock when they slipped and I shot over the cliff, thirty feet to the rocks below. Even as I fell and the rifle flew from

my grasp, I heard the buck's loud whistle from the thicket where he was watching me, and then the heavy plunge of the deer as they jumped away.

A great drift at the foot of the cliff saved me. I picked myself up, fearfully bruised but with nothing broken, found my rifle and limped away four miles through the woods to the road, thinking as I went that I was well served for having delivered the deer "from the power of the dog," only to take advantage of their long run to secure a head that my skill had failed to win. I wondered, with an extra twinge in my limp, whether I had saved Old Wally by taking the chase out of his hands unceremoniously. Above all, I wondered — and here I would gladly follow another trail over the same ground — whether the noble beast, grown weary with running, his splendid strength failing for the first time, and his little, long-tended flock ready to give in and have the tragedy over, knew just what he was doing in mincing along the cliff's edge with his heedless enemy close behind. What did he think and feel, looking back from his hiding, and what did his loud whistle mean? But that is always the despair of studying the wild things. When your problem is almost solved, night comes and the trail ends.

When I could walk again easily vacation was over, the law was on, and the deer were safe.

SNOW BOUND

MARCH is a weary month for the wood folk. One who follows them then has it borne in upon him continually that life is a struggle, — a keen, hard, hunger-driven struggle to find enough to keep a-going and sleep warm till the tardy sun comes north again with his rich living. The fall abundance of stored food has all been eaten, except in out-of-the-way corners that one stumbles upon in a long day's wandering; the game also is wary and hard to find from being constantly hunted by eager enemies.

It is then that the sparrow falleth. You find him on the snow, a wind-blown feather guiding your eye to the open where he fell in mid-flight; or under the tree, which shows that he lost his grip in the night. His empty crop tells the whole pitiful story, and why you find him there cold and dead, his toes curled up and his body feather-light. You would find more but for the fact that hunger-pointed eyes are keener than yours and earlier abroad, and that crow and jay and mink and wildcat have greater interest than you in finding where the sparrow fell.

It is then, also, that the owl, who hunts the sparrow o' nights, grows so light from scant feeding that he cannot fly against the wind. If he would go back to his starting point while the March winds are out, he must needs come down close to the ground and yew-yaw towards his objective, making leeway like an old boat without ballast or centerboard.

The grouse have taken to bud-eating from necessity — birch buds mostly, with occasional trips to the orchards for variety. They live much now in the trees, which they dislike; but with a score of hungry enemies prowling for them day and night, what can a poor grouse do?

When a belated snow falls, you follow their particular enemy, the fox, where he wanders, wanders, wanders on his night's hunting. Across the meadow, to dine on the remembrance of field mice — alas! safe now under the crust; along the brook, where he once caught frogs; through the thicket, where the grouse were hatched; past the bullbrier tangle, where the covey of quail once rested nightly; into the farmyard, where the dog is loose and the chickens are safe under lock and key, instead of roosting in trees; across the highway, and through the swamp, and into the big bare empty woods; till in the sad gray morning light he digs under the wild apple tree and sits

down on the snow to eat a frozen apple, lest his stomach cry too loudly while he sleeps the day away and tries to forget that he is hungry.

Everywhere it is the same story: hard times and poor hunting. Even the chickadees are hard pressed to keep up appearances and have their sweet love note ready at the first smell of spring in the air.

This was the lesson that the great woods whispered sadly when a few idle March days found me gliding on snowshoes over the old familiar ground. Wild geese had honked an invitation from the South Shore; but one can never study a wild goose; the only satisfaction is to see him swing in on broad wings over the decoys — one glorious moment ere the gun speaks and the dog jumps and everything is spoiled. So I left gun and rifle behind, and went off to the woods of happy memories to see how my deer were faring.

The wonder of the snow was gone; there was left only its cold bitterness and a vague sense that it ought no longer to cumber the ground, but would better go away as soon as possible and spare the wood folk any more suffering. The litter of a score of storms covered its soiled rough surface; every shred of bark had left its dark stain where the decaying sap had melted and spread in the midday sun. The hard crust, which made such excellent running for my

snowshoes, seemed bitterly cruel when I thought of the starving wild things and of the abundance of food on the brown earth, just four feet below their hungry bills and noses.

The winter had been unusually severe. Reports had come to me from the North Woods of deep snows, and of deer dying of starvation and cold in their yards. I confess that I was anxious as I hurried along. Now that the hunt was over and the deer had won, they belonged to me more than ever — more even than if the stuffed head of the buck looked down on my hall, instead of resting proudly over his own strong shoulders. My snowshoes clicked a rapid march through the sad gray woods, while the March wind thrummed an accompaniment high up among the bare branches, and the ground-spruce nodded briskly, beating time with their green tips, as if glad of any sound or music that would break the chill silence until the birds came back.

Here and there the snow told stories; gay stories, tragic stories, sad, wandering, patient stories of the little woods-people, which the frost had hardened into crust, as if Nature would keep their memorials forever, like the records on the sun-hardened bricks of Babylon. But would the deer live? Would the big buck's cunning provide a yard large enough for wide

wandering, with plenty of browse along the paths to carry his flock safely through the winter's hunger? That was a story, waiting somewhere ahead, which made me hurry away from the foot-written records that otherwise would have kept me busy for hours.

Crossbills called welcome to me, high overhead. Nothing can starve them out. A red squirrel rushed headlong out of his hollow tree at the first click of my snowshoes. Nothing can check his curiosity or his scolding except his wife, whom he likes, and the weasel, whom he is mortally afraid of. Chickadees followed me shyly with their blandishments — *tsic-a-deeee?* with that gentle up-slide of questioning. "Is the spring really coming? Are — are you a harbinger?"

But the snowshoes clicked on, away from the sweet blarney, leaving behind the little flatterers who were honestly glad to see me in the woods again, and who would fain have delayed me. Other questions, stern ones, were calling ahead. Would the cur dogs find the yard and exterminate the innocents? Would Old Wally — but no; Wally had the "rheumatiz," and was out of the running. Ill-wind blew the deer good that time; else he would long ago have run them down on snowshoes and cut their throats, as if they were indeed his "tarnal sheep" that had run wild in the woods.

At the southern end of a great hardwood ridge I found the first path of their yard. It was half filled with snow, unused since the last two storms. A glance on either side, where everything eatable within reach of a deer's neck had long ago been cropped close, showed plainly why the path was abandoned. I followed it a short distance before running into another path, and another, then into a great tangle of deer ways spreading out crisscross over the eastern and southern slopes of the ridge.

In some of the paths were fresh deer tracks and the signs of recent feeding. My heart jumped at sight of one great hoof mark. I had measured and studied it too often to fail to recognize its owner. There was browse here still, to be had for the cropping. I began to be hopeful for my little flock, and to feel a higher regard for their leader, who could plan a yard, it seemed, as well as a flight, and who could not be deceived by early abundance into outlining a small yard, forgetting the late snows and the spring hunger.

I was stooping to examine the more recent signs, when a sharp snort made me raise my head quickly. In the path before me stood a doe, all a-quiver, her feet still braced from the suddenness with which she had stopped at sight of an unknown object blocking

the path ahead. Behind her two other deer checked themselves and stood like statues, unable to see, but obeying their leader promptly.

All three were frightened and excited, not simply curious, as they would have been had they found me in their path unexpectedly. The widespread nostrils and heaving sides showed that they had been running hard. Those in the rear (I could see them over the top of the scrub spruce, behind which I crouched in the path) said in every muscle: "Go on! No matter what it is, the danger behind is worse. Go on, go on!" Insistence was in the air. The doe felt it and bounded aside. The crust had softened in the sun, and she plunged through it when she struck, *cr-r-runch*, *cr-r-runch*, up to her sides at every jump. The others followed, just swinging their heads for a look and a sniff at me, springing from hole to hole in the snow, and making but a single track. A dozen jumps and they struck another path and turned into it, running as before down the ridge. In the swift glimpses they gave me I noticed with satisfaction that, though thin and a bit ragged in appearance, they were by no means starved. The veteran leader had provided well for his little family.

I followed their back track up the ridge for perhaps half a mile, when another track made me turn aside.

Two days before, a single deer had been driven out of the yard at a point where three paths met. She had been running down the ridge when something in front met her and drove her headlong out of her course. The soft edges of the path were cut and torn by suspicious claw marks.

I followed her flight anxiously, finding here and there, where the snow had been softest, dog tracks big and little. The deer was tired from long running, apparently; the deep holes in the snow, where she had broken through the crust, were not half the regular distance apart. A little way from the path I found her, cold and stiff, her throat horribly torn by the pack which had run her to death. Her hind feet were still doubled under her, just as she had landed from her last despairing jump, when the tired muscles could do no more, and she sank down without a struggle to let the dogs do their cruel work.

I had barely read all this, and had not yet finished measuring the largest tracks to see if it were her old enemy that, as dogs frequently do, had gathered a pirate band about him and led them forth to the slaughter of the innocents, when a far-away cry came stealing down through the gray woods. Hark! the eager yelp of curs and the leading hoot of a hound. I whipped out my knife to cut a club, and was off for

the sounds on a galloping run, which is the swiftest possible gait on snowshoes.

There were no deer paths here; for the hardwood browse, upon which deer depend for food, grew mostly on the other sides of the ridge. That the chase should turn this way, out of the yard's limits, showed the dogs' cunning, and that they were not new at their evil business. They had divided their forces again, as they had undoubtedly done when hunting the poor doe whose body I had just found. Part of the pack hunted down the ridge in full cry, while the rest lay in wait to spring at the flying game as it came on and drive it out of the paths into the deep snow, where it would speedily be at their mercy. At the thought I gripped the club hard, promising to stop that kind of hunting for good, if only I could get half a chance.

Presently, above the scrape of my snowshoes, I heard the deer coming, *cr-r-runch! cr-r-runch!* the heavy plunges growing shorter and fainter, while behind the sounds an eager, whining trail-cry grew into a fierce howl of canine exultation. Something was telling me to hurry, hurry; that the big buck I had so often hunted was in my power at last, and that, if I would square accounts, I must beat the dogs, though they were nearer to him now than I. The excitement of a

new kind of hunt, a hunt to save, not to kill, was tingling all over me when I circled a dense thicket of firs with a rush, and there he lay, up to his shoulders in the snow before me.

He had taken his last jump. The splendid strength which had carried him so far was spent now to the last ounce. He lay resting easily in the snow, his head outstretched on the crust before him, awaiting the tragedy that had followed him for years, by lake and clearing and winter yard, and that burst out behind him now with a cry to make one's nerves shudder. The glory of his antlers was gone; he had dropped them months before; but the mighty shoulders and sinewy neck and perfect head showed how well, how grandly he had deserved my hunting.

He threw up his head as I burst out upon him from an utterly unexpected quarter — the very thing that I had so often tried to do, in vain, in the old glorious days. "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? Well, here am I." That is what his eyes, great, sad, accusing eyes, were saying as he laid his head down on the snow again, quiet as an Indian at the torture, too proud to struggle where nothing was to be gained but pity or derision.

A strange, uncanny silence had settled over the woods. Wolves cease their cry in the last swift burst

of speed that will bring the game in sight. Then the dogs broke out of the cover behind him with a fiercer howl that was too much for even his nerves to stand. Nothing on earth could have met such a death unmoved. No ears, however trained, could hear that fierce cry for blood without turning to meet it face to face. With a mighty effort the buck whirled in the snow and gathered himself for the tragedy.

Far ahead of the pack came a small, swift bulldog that, with no nose of his own for hunting, had followed the pirate leader for mere love of killing. As he jumped for the throat, the buck, with his last strength, reared on his hind legs, so as to get his fore feet clear of the snow, and plunged down again with a hard, swift sabre-cut of his right hoof. It caught the dog on the neck as he rose on the spring, and ripped him from ear to tail. Deer and dog came down together. Then the buck rose swiftly for his last blow, and the knife-edged hoofs shot down like lightning; one straight, hard drive with the crushing force of a ten-ton hammer behind it — and his first enemy was out of the hunt forever. Before he had time to gather himself again the big yellow brindle, with the hound's blood showing in nose and ears,— Old Wally's dog, — leaped into sight. His whining trail-cry changed to a fierce growl as he sprang for the buck's nose.

"With a hard, swift saber-cut
of his left hoof"

I had waited for just this moment in hiding, and jumped to meet it. The club came down between the two heads; and there was no reserve this time in the muscles that swung it. It caught the brute fair on the head, where the nose begins to dome up into the skull,—and he too had harried his last deer.

Two other curs had leaped aside with quick instinct the moment they saw me, and vanished into the thickets, as if conscious of their evil doing and anxious to avoid detection. But the third, a large collie,—a dog that, when he does go wrong, becomes the most cunning and vicious of brutes,—flew straight at my throat with a snarl like a gray wolf cheated of his killing. I have faced bear and panther and bull moose when the red danger-light blazed into their eyes; but never before or since have I seen such awful fury in a brute's face. It swept over me in an instant that it was his life or mine; there was no question or alternative. A lucky cut of the club disabled him, and I finished the job on the spot, for the good of the deer and the community.

The big buck had not moved, nor tried to, after his last great effort. Now he only turned his head and lifted it wearily, as if to get away from the intolerable smell of his dog enemies that lay dying under his very nose. His great, sorrowful, questioning eyes were

turned on me continually, with a look that only innocence could possibly meet. No man on earth, I think, could have looked into them for a full moment and then raised his hand to slay.

I approached very quietly, and dragged the dogs away from him, one by one. His eyes followed me always. His nostrils spread, his head came up with a start when I flung the first cur aside to leeward. But he made no motion; only his eyes had a wonderful light in them when I dragged his last enemy, the one he had killed himself, from under his very head and threw it after the others. Then I sat down quietly in the snow, and we were face to face at last.

He feared me — I could hardly expect otherwise, while a deer has memory — but he lay perfectly still, his head extended on the snow, his sides heaving. After a little while he made a few bounds forward, at right angles to the course he had been running, with marvelous instinct remembering the nearest point in the many paths out of which the pack had driven him. But he stopped and lay quiet at the first sound of my snowshoes behind him. "The chase law holds. You have caught me; I am yours," — this is what his sad eyes were saying. And sitting down quietly near him again, I tried to reassure him. "You are safe.

Take your own time. No dog shall harm you now." — That is what I tried to make him feel by the very power of my own feeling, never more strongly roused than now for any wild creature.

I whistled a little tune softly, which always rouses the wood folk's curiosity; but as he lay quiet, listening, his ears shot back and forth nervously at a score of sounds that I could not hear, as if above the music he caught faint echoes of the last fearful chase. Then I brought out my lunch and, nibbling a bit myself, pushed a slice of black bread over the crust towards him with a long stick.

It was curious and intensely interesting to watch the struggle. At first he pulled away, as if I would poison him. Then a new rich odor began to steal up into his hungry nostrils. For weeks he had not fed full; he had been running hard since daylight, and was faint and exhausted. And in all his life he had never smelled anything so good. He turned his head to question me with his eyes. Slowly his nose came down, searching for the bread. "If he would only eat! — that is a truce which I would never break," I kept thinking over and over, and stopped eating in my eagerness to have him share with me the hunter's crust. His nose touched it; then through his hunger came the smell of the man — the danger smell that

had followed him day after day in the beautiful October woods, and over white winter trails when he fled for his life, and still the man followed. The remembrance was too much. He raised his head with an effort and bounded away.

I followed slowly, keeping well out to one side of his trail, and sitting quietly within sight whenever he rested in the snow. Wild animals soon lose their fear in the presence of man if one avoids all excitement, even of interest, and is quiet in his motions. His fear was gone now, but the old wild freedom and the intense desire for life — a life which he had resigned when I appeared suddenly before him, and the pack broke out behind — were coming back with renewed force. His bounds grew longer, firmer, his stops less frequent, till he broke at last into a deer path and shook himself, as if to throw off all memory of the experience.

From a thicket of fir a doe, that had been listening in hiding to the sounds of his coming and to the faint unknown click, which was the voice of my snowshoes, came out to meet him. Together they trotted down the path, turning often to look and listen, and vanished at last, like gray shadows, into the gray stillness of the March woods.

Cheokhes, *chē-ok-hĕs′*, the mink.
Ch'geegee-lokh, *ch'gee-gee′-lock*, the chickadee.
Cheplahgan, *chep-lâh′-gan*, the bald eagle.
Chigwooltz, *chig-wooltz′*, the bullfrog.
Clóte Scarpe, a legendary hero, like Hiawatha, of the Northern Indians. Pronounced variously, Clote Scarpe, Groscap, Gluscap, etc.
Deedeeaskh, *dee-dee′-ask*, the blue jay.
Hukweem, *huk-weem′*, the great northern diver, or loon.
Ismaques, *iss-mâ-ques′*, the fish-hawk.
Kagax, *kăg′-ăx*, the weasel.
Kakagos, *kâ-kâ-gŏs′*, the raven.
Keeokuskh, *kee-o-kusk′*, the muskrat.
Keeonekh, *kee′-o-nek*, the otter.
Killooleet, *kil′-loo-leet′*, the white-throated sparrow.
Kookooskoos, *koo-koo-skoos′*, the great horned owl.
Koskomenos, *kŏs′-kŏm-e-nŏs′*, the kingfisher.
Kupkawis, *cup-ka′-wis*, the barred owl.
Kwaseekho, *kwâ-seek′-ho*, the sheldrake.
Lhoks, *locks*, the panther.
Malsun, *măl′-sun*, the wolf.
Meeko, *meek′-ō*, the red squirrel.
Megaleep, *meg′-â-leep*, the caribou.
Milicete, *mil′-ĭ-cete*, the name of an Indian tribe; written also Malicete.
Mitches, *mit-chĕs*, the birch partridge, or ruffed grouse.
Moktaques, *mok-tâ′-ques*, the hare.
Mooween, *moo-ween′*, the black bear.
Musquash, *mus′-quâsh*, the muskrat.
Nemox, *nĕm′-ox*, the fisher.
Pekquam, *pek-wăm′*, the fisher.
Seksagadagee, *sek′-sâ-gā-dâ′-gee*, the Canada grouse, or spruce partridge.
Skooktum, *skook′-tum*, the trout.
Tookhees, *tôk′-hees*, the wood mouse.
Upweekis, *up-week′-iss*, the Canada lynx.

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